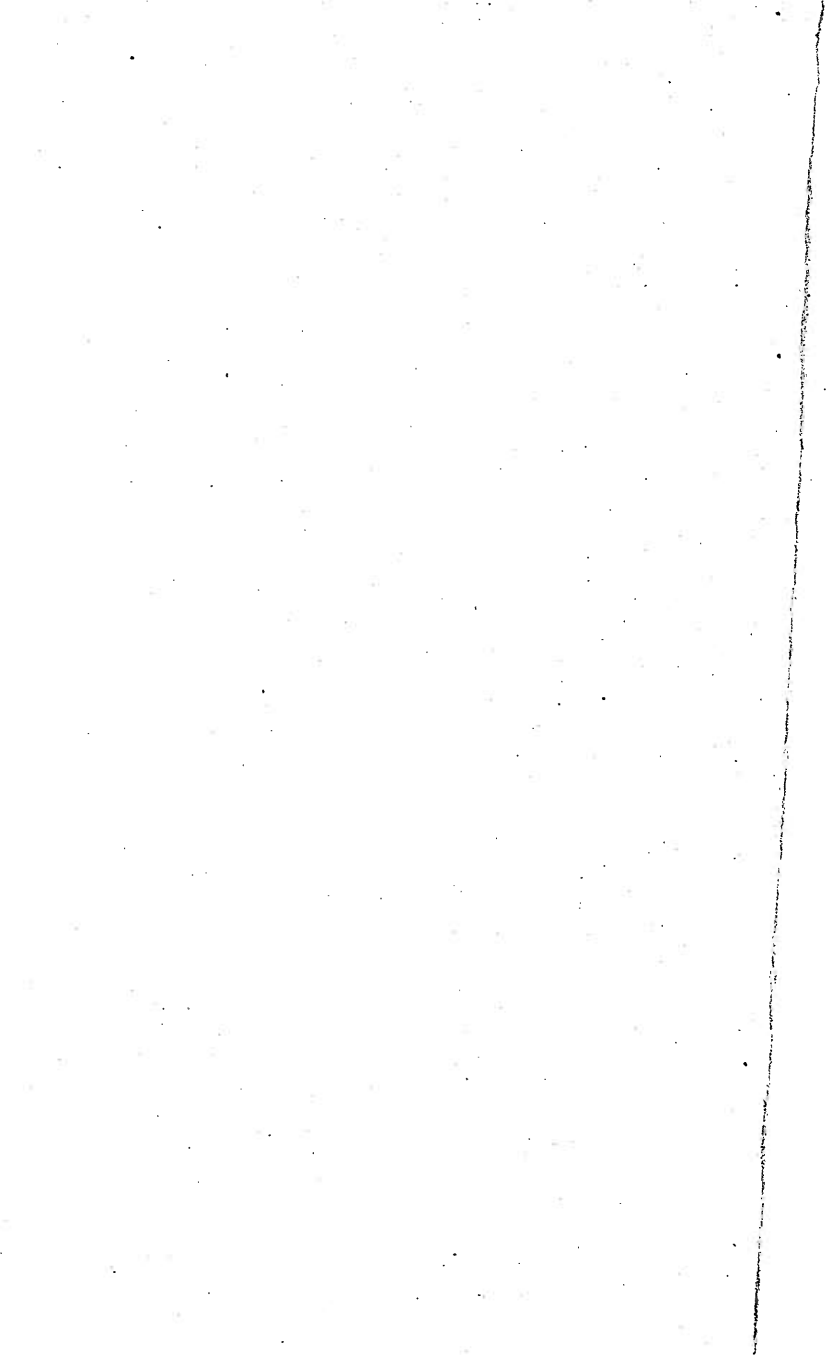


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**THE GOSPEL OF THE  
LIVING JESUS**





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# THE GOSPEL OF THE LIVING JESUS

BY

T. H. DAVIES, M.A.

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New York

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1928

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TO  
MY MOTHER  
AND TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER



## FOREWORD

THE specific title of this work contains the only excuse for the production of another book on the subject of Jesus and the Gospel. For its theme, the Gospel of the Living Jesus, is one upon which the last word has not been, and indeed never can be, fully spoken.

This Gospel is centered in Jesus himself, and his unique personality is rich in hidden potencies and significances for the life of faith. Such a Gospel must involve progressive explorations and revelations whose results are, at any particular stage, largely provisional and personal. Much depends upon our individual experience of faith, upon our spiritual insight and devotion. Any sympathetic exposition of this subject is apt, therefore, to resolve itself into a personal confession of faith. Its inherent challenge is, however, none the less objective and universal because it is subjectively formulated and apprehended.

An attempt is herein made to face such a challenge and to restate the problem of Jesus and the Gospel in terms of the living issues of his spiritual character as a recreative energy of life and experience. Whether this intention, worthy enough in itself, shall find fuller justification in performance, is a matter upon which readers themselves must be left to pronounce.

These studies are addressed not to experts, but to

all those who possess some aptitude for reflective thought; and especially to those who realize the very urgent demand in our day for a spiritual faith which is as vital and comprehensive as life itself. For all others who view such thought with suspicion and refuse its personal challenge, this survey will possess little interest and less value. They will still go on raising the cry for a "simple" Gospel, and will persist in ignoring the fact that the Gospel which is indeed simple for faith is yet essentially profound for the thought it inspires.

Any fruitful discussion of this subject must involve some abstruseness of thought and language, which will yield only to an arduous process of sustained thinking. But where the problem comes to grips with our common experience of life, I trust that its practical issues are stated in language which is both unambiguous and uncompromising.

No effort has been made to cumber these pages with quotations and references which the general reader is not in a position to verify, and which might serve only to diminish interest by distracting attention. I wish to avoid the charge of attempting to dragoon the mind into submission merely by parading an imposing array of authorities, and thus of appearing to have forestalled investigation by resorting to the oracular device of calling in the experts. Such tactics are utterly worthless in defense of a position which may otherwise prove to be inherently weak and untenable. The subject demands honest treatment, and every work must rest its case entirely on its own merits.

Anyone acquainted with the growing volume of contemporary literature on the subject will discover, however, ample evidence in these pages of an indebt-

edness to others which is both abundant and enduring. No man's ideas are entirely his own property and neither are they entirely new. Originality is not novelty but individuality. The most that one can aspire to is to subject the floating conceptions of his age to new emphases and syntheses in terms of his own experiences of faith, and thereby to transmute vagrant ideas into instruments of personality.

An impartial consideration of this theme cannot afford to ignore that progressive elucidation of its content and significance which stands to the credit of theological and philosophical research within and without the Church. Prejudice and partisanship are fatal to the truth as it is in Jesus; for truth shines only in its own light. It is hoped that these pages will prove to be largely free from such taints of inordinate bias, and that they will disclose a freedom in the use of material which is qualified only by reservations of sincerity and regard for truth. Constructive results have thus been incorporated in the body of the work, which I trust have been impartially appropriated without respect to their literary source or ecclesiastical affiliations.

In place of detailed references, I wish herewith to express my unfeigned gratitude to a host of scholars and writers of all schools and sects, at home and abroad, whose devoted labors have put me under lasting obligation for enrichment of thought and life. But, for reasons already given, they must needs accept the modest status of anonymity. Invidious distinctions cannot otherwise be avoided; and besides, it is desired that this study should commend itself as an individual expression and unfoldment of personal experience and faith. It is based upon those original and most valuable authorities



which are within the reach of all. I refer to the Gospel narratives more especially, in which there is conserved for us a permanent spiritual revelation of the grace of God in Jesus as a vitalizing energy of personal and social redemption. Jesus is alive only in this atmosphere.

Few books do justice to their theme, and this one is no exception. This work was originally planned on a much more elaborate scale, but it got out of hand in that form. It thus became necessary to confine the survey within strict limits. The result may well be that some very important matters receive scant attention, and that others escape notice altogether.

However, I have tried to cover the whole ground as far as the fundamental "principles" of the abiding Gospel are concerned. This is all that is attempted and it is the answer to any criticisms that may arise bearing upon detailed questions of doctrine. The rest may be inferred from the postulates that are enunciated and advocated. It would, perhaps, for this reason be more accurate to describe our study as a survey of "some aspects" of its subject—such, for example, as relate more especially to its ethical and religious implications for the life of faith. For it involves an evaluation of the Gospel in terms of the inner life, the inner mind and spirit, of Jesus as this discloses its values and potencies within the context of spiritual experience.

This study claims to be no more than a personal document, and its main purpose is to commend the Gospel of the Living Jesus in terms of what one of his many disciples has found in his fellowship of grace. It is sent forth with the prayer that He who knoweth our hearts will pardon all its faults and

errors, and that its pages may bear witness to the immortal grace and glory of Him who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

T. H. D.

March, 1928



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD . . . . .	7
 CHAPTER	
I. THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM . . . . .	17
I. The Jesus of History . . . . .	17
II. The Christ of Faith . . . . .	24
III. The Reflected Personality . . . . .	31
IV. A New Approach . . . . .	40
II. THE FACTS OF JESUS . . . . .	47
I. Facts and Beliefs . . . . .	47
II. The Good Will . . . . .	53
III. Certitudes of Faith . . . . .	65
IV. The Glad Tidings . . . . .	73
III. THE COMMUNAL PORTRAIT . . . . .	85
I. Representative Views . . . . .	85
II. The Moral Imperative . . . . .	92
III. The God-Consciousness . . . . .	98
IV. The Divine Order . . . . .	104
V. The Living Spirit . . . . .	111
IV. THE WITNESS OF CHARACTER . . . . .	119
I. The Unique Life . . . . .	119
II. The Devotional Background . . . . .	123
III. The Challenging Personality . . . . .	135
IV. The Fullness of Grace . . . . .	148
V. THE VICARIOUS MINISTRY . . . . .	158
I. The Basic Element . . . . .	158

CHAPTER	PAGE
II. The Social Gospel . . . . .	163
III. The Atoning Sacrifice . . . . .	171
IV. Cosmic Redemption . . . . .	184
V. The Personal Approach . . . . .	190
VI. THE KINGDOM OF GRACE . . . . .	203
I. The Living Present . . . . .	203
II. The Holy Lord . . . . .	208
III. The Eternal Savior . . . . .	216
IV. The Indwelling Christ . . . . .	225

**THE GOSPEL OF THE  
LIVING JESUS**



# THE GOSPEL OF THE LIVING JESUS

## CHAPTER I

### THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM

#### I. THE JESUS OF HISTORY

ANY impartial study of the Gospel of Jesus must first deal with the question of its historical basis and context. Is this Gospel founded upon fact or fiction? If upon fact, as we assume, then what is the precise nature of our historical data? What are the sources through which these are transmitted to us? In what sense and to what extent do the documents conserve for us the portrait of a historical personality?

Briefly, the Gospel is established upon the earthly life and work of the Jesus of history, and the sources of our knowledge of this Jesus are the four Gospels. All that we can really know of him as a historical figure is preserved for us in these records. One of them, the Gospel of John, is obviously an interpretative account, so that we must depend largely if not entirely for our facts upon the other three, that is, upon the Synoptic Gospels. These latter contain in many respects, though not in all, most of the evidence available for a study of the historical Jesus. They claim to portray in concrete outline the essential features of his earthly life and ministry.



When, however, we consider the vicissitudes of history, certain doubts arise with regard to the general situation. What, for example, can we really hope to know at this late date of the career of Jesus? What prospects are there of determining with any degree of certainty the historical implications of the Gospel, the exact character of the facts to which it is anchored and upon which it is based? Obviously, our first concern is with the accredited sources and with the data they provide. Apart from these, we have no means whatsoever of deciding the issues at stake. No presuppositions should be allowed to stand in the way of an honest investigation of the relevant documents at our disposal, and no verdict can possibly be accepted as final which ignores entirely the testimony of the records.

But when we have thus settled the question of our sources our troubles only begin. Other questions and problems arise. How are they to be interpreted? In what sense and to what extent are their narrations historical? In what respect do they reproduce the earthly story of Jesus? Wherein consists the actual facts which relate to his life and work? How far is it now possible for us, even with the aid of the sources, to recover the lineaments of the historical Jesus? What needs to be conserved in order to account for the Gospel? What is essential and fundamental in the matter of a reconstruction of the Jesus of history? How far, indeed, is the Evangelists' portrayal of Jesus really historical? What, again, are the psychological limits of history itself? And, in any case, what is meant by the historical? What is its exact nature and character? In short, what should we, and how much can we, expect from history as a human process?

These are some of the questions which arise when we begin to investigate the records themselves. Of course, there are extremists who maintain that all their reputed facts are but mythical and legendary reconstructions, and that such idealizations leave us therefore with no ground for believing that the earthly Jesus had any existence at all. We assume, on the contrary, that he lived, and that both the Gospel and the narratives are products of his life and work in the flesh.

What, then, are the "historical data" of the Gospel as these are embodied for us in the four Gospel narratives? There are three answers to this question, which we shall now proceed to consider in a general way.

We have, in the first place, the answer of *traditionalism*. According to this view, which is the popular view, the Gospels provide us with a complementary system of bare and pure facts, empirical and external, which confront us with the primitive historical details of the earthly career of Jesus. No distinction is made between the original data and the beliefs and interpretations, shared alike by the early reporters and the Church, with which they were subsequently incorporated. No account is thus taken of contemporary needs and interests and thought-worlds, nor of the psychological contexts and limitations of all historical traditions and records.

This view accepts the whole picture of Jesus portrayed in the narratives, in its composite character and with its blending of facts and interpretations, as historical in every detail. The Gospels therefore conserve for us the original features of the historical Jesus, all the raw events and pure sayings and doings

associated with his earthly life and work. His reporters were thus automatons. In order to guarantee such a literal portrayal, a mechanical dogma of infallible inspiration has to be invented, and this sets its imprimatur upon the records just as they stand. Of course, this simplifies the situation, and the Jesus of history becomes now the metaphysical Jesus of the Church and the historic creeds. This may indeed prove ultimately to be so, but the exact sense in which it is true remains to be determined.

However, we are more directly concerned with the present implications of this estimate. If it is correct, we have bare and unadorned facts of Jesus in the Gospels and we have the Jesus of history faithfully portrayed in the reports and representations of the Evangelists. We have therefore a literal and photostatic reproduction of all the relevant events and words and works associated with his historical career. The situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that Jesus himself never wrote a word, except in the sand. But, we are told, the Holy Spirit helped the Evangelists to select infallible accounts and to write pure history. This process of divine superintendence must then be pushed farther back to cover the oral traditions and the memories of the first disciples as well. How then are we to explain the many divergences and contradictions within the records themselves?

What is the logical result of this theory? Clearly, if interpreted in this bald fashion, the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is that of a supernatural being in a gross and magical sense. For the writers appear to clothe him with the metaphysical potencies and attributes of the Deity, and as such he was an

object of pious regard in some quarters from the very beginning. This Jesus is obviously a divine being in a literal and hypostatic sense. Some of the beliefs and traditions of the Church in the first century seem to support this estimate.

But what of his humanity? And how are we to explain the fact that his first disciples saw little that was exceptional in his earthly career and character and failed utterly to perceive any tokens of official dignity while they were with Jesus in the flesh? To say that their eyes were holden, or that they were dull of understanding, is but to admit that there was little or nothing in the person and work of the historical Jesus to appeal to the physical senses, and that the estimates of the Gospel are thus faith-evaluations which were inspired by the resurrection. For the cross blasted all the former messianic hopes of the disciples, and their later interpretations of Jesus emerged after their experience of the resurrection. The narratives were vital products of their resurrection-faith and were constructed in terms thereof. They emerged within this atmosphere and the circumstances of their origin color all their presentations.

Traditionalism, however, seeks to recover the historical Jesus through, first, an inclusive system of empirical events; and second, an archaic catalogue of contemporary interpretations in which these events are embedded. The historical basis and context of the Gospel, and of the career of Jesus, are thus matters of external sayings and doings which have been reported in a literal and infallible fashion, so that we now have certified data and *ipsissima verba* of Jesus himself. Our records contain a statistical and standardized account of the earthly life

and work of Jesus, upon which the Gospel is based and in terms of which it is formulated in history.

The obvious retort to all this is that history does not conserve such literalistic and absolute accounts and documents. For history is not literal but symbolic, not absolute but relative, not objective but presentational. Its essence is not empirical but psychological and interpretative. There is therefore no such thing as *pure* history. There never was any period in history when Christianity existed in a raw state as an original system of uninterpreted and unassailable rudiments and deposits. Pure history is a fiction. It is a mere mechanical thing of sounds and noises, of muscular movements and locomotions, of dates and chronologies. Bare facts can survive in history only as they are interpreted, and they achieve a history only in and through such formulations. The earthly Jesus became thus from the very first the subject of versatile and autonomous interpretations, in virtue of which he has outlived his era and has annexed for himself a unique place upon the field of the ages.

Whatever then we may think of the Gospels as they stand, they certainly do not confront us with bare empirical and historical facts which can be tabulated in any statistical fashion. They do not therefore delineate the literalistic features of the historical Jesus. Such accounts, even if possible, would be useless and worthless. For they would still need to be interpreted, and interpreted now for the very first time by those who necessarily can lay no claim to any personal knowledge of the earthly Jesus.

There could be no accounts of any kind unless the original data had been subjected to evaluations

from the very beginning. The Gospels are thus interpretations and representations based upon facts and events which are now embedded in the narrations, but which are undiscoverable and unrecoverable with any degree of certainty. Indeed, they were never recoverable in their exact original form. They were, from the very outset, incorporated within a highly colored context of contemporary beliefs and thought-worlds, religious needs and apologetic interests. They survived only in the guise of their historical significances.

Our historical data are not therefore embodied in the Gospels in any superficial manner. They are not there on the surface, and they are not discrete matters of overt sayings and doings which are guaranteed for us by some artificial process of inspiration that converts the records into oracles. The practical result of this method of approach is that each interpreter becomes a law unto himself and then falls back for his expositions upon his own mental habits and resources. This theory of our historical material has far too many divergences and discrepancies for which to account and it is utterly inconsistent with the laws of both psychology and history. Things are not what they seem, and the Jesus of history can never be literally identified with those Oriental portrayals and presentations whose exact form was too obviously determined by local ideas and needs and interests.

Getting back to the Jesus of history is thus not as simple a matter as it would appear to be. It certainly cannot be resolved into a mere mechanical affair of getting back to the Gospel narratives. The question is, How are we to interpret them when we get there? The theory under review is too naïve

and superficial to commend itself to thoughtful readers. It emphasizes only the contingencies, confuses them with the essentials, and attempts to reproduce the historical Jesus in terms of the ephemeral and external. Needless to say, it fails utterly to recover for us the Jesus of history. Instead, it offers us either an Oriental messiah or an anthropomorphized deity. Unconsciously, traditionalism plays thereby into the hands of the historicists and the radicals, the first maintaining that Jesus belongs only to his own age and world, the second denying his human existence altogether.

The question arises, Is the Jesus of traditionalism a historical figure or only an ecclesiastical construct of faith? In other words, is traditionalism concerned actually with the Jesus of history or with the Christ of faith?

## II. THE CHRIST OF FAITH

We are already familiar with the theological antithesis between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

This distinction lends some support to the hypothesis that the Christ of faith is in no sense the Jesus of history, but is rather some mystical and exalted being who came into existence after the resurrection and through the resurrection faith. Some even blame Paul for the invention of this celestial figure, and for the theological antithesis created thereby. But while it is indeed true that he made most of it, the distinction itself appears to have been in existence prior to his conversion to the faith of Jesus.

Some such distinction is, however, structurally involved in the documentary presentations of the

Gospel. For it is clear to all impartial students that the Evangelists portray largely for us the Christ of faith; or better, the Jesus of history who has now become the Christ of faith. Some maintain that the historical Jesus was always the Christ of faith, although the apprehension of this fact came chronologically after the resurrection and was psychologically mediated through a local and contemporary environment of Jewish hopes and beliefs and world-views. In any case, the distinction is quite valid. For it was faith in Jesus that first discovered the significance of his words and works, that inspired the composition of the narratives, and that rescued him from the oblivion of a dead past. Otherwise, the historical Jesus would have been tangled in the toils of history itself, held fast by its limitations, and would have remained forever unknown to future generations.

Nevertheless, this antithesis between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith complicates the question of the precise character of our historical data. This matter has still to be determined. Traditionalism has failed us. But this offers us only one answer to the question with which we are now concerned. There are others, and we shall take them in the order of chronological precedence.

There is, in the second place, the answer of *liberalism*. This view contends that the Jesus of traditionalism is not the Jesus of history but the Christ of faith. Its exponents make much of this distinction. They maintain that the Gospels push to the front not a portrait of the historical Jesus, but a heavily tinted ecclesiastical delineation of the Christ of faith. Both, they argue, are distinct and separable, and must be dissociated to effect a real return



to the Jesus of history. This represents the task which confronts them and which they have so far undertaken with varying results.

Liberalism calls attention to the fact that the Gospel narratives were composed some forty years or so after the events which they record. Oral traditions emerged in the interval which were elaborated and subjected to idealizing and dramatizing processes. Meanwhile, the early Church had developed certain lines of interpretation which were prompted by its pragmatic needs, its apologetic interests, and its contemporary beliefs and outlooks. These particular emphases were formulated in doctrines which were evolved in the atmosphere of the resurrection-faith and were elaborated in terms thereof. Jesus himself belonged to the past, and the Church was now concerned with the future. Consequently, interest in the Jesus of history began to wane, as in the case of Paul, with the advance of time and in proportion to the distance which separated the early believers from "the days of his flesh." Knowledge now of Jesus was "after the spirit."

The Gospels, we are again told, were written only partly to give information of the historical life and work of Jesus. The literary impulses which gave birth to them were obviously of a pragmatic, propagandistic, and etioloical character. They were composed to present and vindicate the kind of Jesus, the Christ of faith, who was already being preached and heralded as the Savior of men. That is to say, they were products of the fellowship of the apostolic Church and were written in defense of its actual faith and practice.

This, in bare outline, is the position of liberalism. It emphasizes the distinction between the Jesus of

history and the Christ of faith, and traces the origin of the latter to the resurrection-gospel of the early Church rather than to the earthly life and work of Jesus himself. This Christ of faith, it contends, is the Jesus of Christianity. The Gospels were written as apologies for, and in defense of, this apostolic Christ of faith. The Church dropped the earthly Jesus because it never understood him, and then created for its fellowship a *heavenly* Christ in whom the messianic hopes of Israel were to be fully realized. But it related this celestial being to the Jesus of history and then transferred back all its attributes to his historical personality.

Some, if not all, of the Epistles of Paul were written and circulated before the Gospels, and the Epistles enthrone this Christ of faith. It is clear, therefore, both that these express in this respect the faith of the Church in the interval and that the Gospels which came after were composed in the atmosphere and environment of this faith. Consequently, the facts of the narratives are largely apologetic and etioloical facts of early preaching. They are obviously adorned and overlaid with interpretations and idealizations of various kinds. But, say the liberals, we can in spite of this still get back to the real Jesus of history, and to certain raw facts and broad teachings of an ethical and a religious character.

How do they propose to do this? The answer is, not through getting back to the presentations of the Evangelists, nor even to the portrayals of the earliest sources detected in the narratives, but through a rigid and scientific process of literary and historical research. They maintain that there are different "strata" in the accounts, and that older traditions can be unearthed which are more or less unaffected

by specific doctrinal interests. It is true that there are only fragments and that these are somewhat obscure and casual. But they are extremely important in that they concern the ordinary life and the personal religion of the earthly Jesus. They relate to his normal actions, to his personal behavior and character, to his private life of communion with the Father. There are incidents which are recorded without comment, and these reveal in an existential manner his inner mind and spirit. They illustrate certain habits of thought and practice, a certain trend of character which expresses itself in broad ethical and religious teachings and certitudes of faith. These latter refer in a general way to the fatherhood of God, the infinite value and potencies of the human soul, the glory of sonship, the law of love, the sovereignty of faith, and so forth.

There are, on this view, no certified sayings, and indeed none is necessary. What we have is of far greater value in that it involves a revelation of character, and in that character is *all* there in all its diversified and fragmentary forms. It is immanent and inclusive in all its habits and activities. All that we can guarantee, therefore, are certain enlarging and enriching ideas and influences of personal character which disclose the inner mind and spirit of Jesus.

Emphasis is therefore laid upon the intimate association of the first disciples with Jesus in the flesh, and upon those ordinary relationships through which such habits and influences asserted themselves. These private and personal traits could not fail to make their own pervasive and indelible impress upon the minds and hearts of these early followers of Jesus. It is maintained that both they

and their work owed far more than they were aware of to this personal fellowship, to this daily example of the devotional life of Jesus. This made its own witness, and what they got from Jesus thereby were not theories and doctrines but a new vitality of life and a real renaissance of soul. It is very probable, then, that we must trace the origin of the faith and fellowship of the early Church not to any conscious doctrinal emphases, but rather to that spiritual resurgence of life which was subconsciously associated with the personal memories and impacts of the private life and character of Jesus. This was the real dynamic, and this is the witness of life in the narratives. The rest is interpretation.

Accordingly, liberals distinguish between the religion of Jesus and the religion *about* Jesus, between facts of history and facts of faith. They contend that the personal religion of Jesus is the fount and inspiration of the religion about Jesus, and that our main problem is to unearth the former from the débris of the latter.

Credit must certainly be given to liberalism for its ethical and religious emphases, and for its attempt to reconstruct the Jesus of history in terms of his ordinary activities and his devotional life rather than in terms of the thaumaturgical reflections of his early disciples. Jesus has indeed been too far removed from us, and the question of his personal life and religion has been sorely neglected. The result is that his appeal fails to establish its own inherent point of contact, and that the Gospel itself tends to be resolved into a system of legal and external rudiments and deposits. The fellowship of the early Church was chiefly of an ethical and a religious character, and its existence could be inspired only by

ethical and religious forces. These, it is argued, are illustrated in certain fragmentary and uninterpreted sections of the sources, and they bear witness to the spiritual impacts of the personal religious life of Jesus. They are all concerned with ordinary matters of everyday life, with the quiet and normal influences of personal behavior and character. These had laid hold of the disciples through their intimacy with the earthly Jesus. They had asserted themselves unconsciously as vitality and had prompted all their contemporary and autonomous presentations.

Liberalism appears to be feeling its way. But because it offers us no more than ideas, it confronts the ordinary man with a task which is too much for him. Its Jesus is too abstract and scholastic, and it stakes his very existence upon casual events which are so obscure and fragmentary that they can be discovered only through some refined process of historical research. Both traditionalists and radicals insist that the "liberal" Jesus is no more than an intellectual construct. Therefore, the alternative is either to take the records as they stand and to deify Jesus, or from the same standpoint to deny his earthly existence altogether, which amounts to the same thing.

Two weaknesses may be noted in liberalism. First, it still looks for the Jesus of history in certain empirical events which are set over against others. Second, it resolves the Gospel into an abstract and a disembodied affair of ethical and religious ideas. The figure of Jesus is thus rescued in some measure from its own age and is clothed in modern dress. But we must admit that its features are very hazy and indistinct. The method of the historicists is

somewhat different and can be dismissed in a few words. They proceed from the evangelical portrayals, and would then solve the problem by entirely isolating the earthly Jesus in his own world. He was a child of his age and, as an archaic figure of history, possesses only some mystical significance for to-day. This school maintains that liberalism has met with no more success than traditionalism in recovering the Jesus of history, and that to modernize him is to lose him entirely.

Neither of the theories mentioned succeeds in getting back to the real Jesus of history in the sense that it gets back to pure history. We have seen that there is no such thing. Interpretations confront us at the very dawn of Christian history, and without them Christian history itself would have been still-born. To get back to certain "original deposits" of events and ideas, personal or sociological, is therefore impossible and, as we hope to prove, equally unnecessary.

Clearly, the whole problem revolves around the anterior question relating to the precise character of the historical. Until this is settled there can be little hope of any real progress in this particular field.

### III. THE REFLECTED PERSONALITY

What, then, is the exact nature and significance of the historical?

Is the historical an incoherent mass of empirical details and events, of exact words and works? Or again, is it a nebulous medley of ideas and ideals? Or finally, is it an atmospheric affair of mass movements and cosmologies, of sociological and evolutionary impacts and environments? The theories

concerned are based respectively upon either one or other of these assumptions. This accounts for their utter failure to define satisfactorily our historical data and to recover for us the Jesus of history.

It is maintained in these pages that the historical is essentially personal and ethical and spiritual. It is fundamentally a fact of spiritual behavior and character, of creative operations and reactions, of inner relationships and sequences, of personal and social significances and products. It is preëminently as such a fact of personality. It is fluid and continuous, and lives only in its personal and spiritual fruits and transformations. The historical is not therefore to be sought in any empirical concatenation of exact words and events, but in the ethical continuities and developments of life and history.

What then, we may again ask, is the precise character of our historical data? This brings us to the last theory, which is the one upheld throughout these pages.

We have, in the third place, the answer of *experientialism*. This calls attention to the self-witness of life and history. Possibly the term can be improved upon, but some such word is necessary to indicate the emphasis that this theory places upon life. It has philosophical affiliations and applications which are relevant for our inquiry in the sense that all conceptions of history are based consciously or unconsciously upon some philosophy of history.

One doubts, however, whether we can yet speak of a school of experientialists in the theological sense. This theory comes last, therefore, both psychologically and chronologically. Briefly, it lays the emphasis upon the spiritual personality, the inner mind and spirit, of the earthly Jesus, and regards

this as a dynamic and recreative energy and vitality of history itself. On this reading, facts of history are facts of personality, and facts of personality are experiential realities of its faith-significances for personality and in history. These facts are "reproducible" and "assimilable" in every age, and they shine therefore in their own light. History is a spiritual movement, ever present and vitalistic. It embodies the spiritual in raw and unrecoverable empirical facts, and this spiritual is a reality of inner significances which are revealed only to faith. History can conserve only the spiritual with any degree of accuracy and certainty, and all its treasures are in earthen vessels.

It is therefore futile to look for certified facts and *ipsissima verba* of Jesus in any literal sense. For if they did exist, they would remain opaque and would still need to be interpreted. And they could be adequately interpreted in terms only of that creative and spiritual vitality of the personality of Jesus which gave them birth, not *vice versa*. We can never recover the Jesus of history merely through reconstructing an external framework of empirical facts. That would be putting the cart before the horse. It is the inner mind and spirit of the earthly Jesus that originated these overt facts and can alone explain and interpret them to our minds and hearts. It is the personal and spiritual that vitalize, that illuminate, that give meaning to the external facts of history; and these demand for their interpretation an experiential approach of faith.

The historical is a personal and dynamic process of life which is creatively and immanently operative in all its versatile empirical forms and contemporary



products. It is a continuous stream of creative causes and reactions, of personal and social influences and transformations, and all its movements represent an organic unity. It is therefore a fact of "significances" which belongs to the realm of values. Could the bald empirical data of the human life of Jesus be fully recovered, there would be little to distinguish them from other facts, and there would be nothing in them which could explain his subsequent sway over the hearts of men. We should find that, in their external character, they were all normal and ordinary occurrences. Their uniqueness consists in their inner and personal significances for faith. This represents their real objective content and worth.

Accordingly, the Jesus of history stands self-revealed not through the medium of bare and literal sayings and events, nor of vague and formal ethical and religious ideas, but in and through those spiritual and dynamic unfoldments and reactions of his personality in history. His personal behavior and character, his inner mind and spirit, are interpretatively unfolded in terms of the thoughts and values his example inspired and established. But experience came first, then interpretations; always life before thought.

Now that we have determined the character of the historical and have equated our historical data with those inner and spiritual realities of the personality of Jesus, there remains but one more question to be dealt with. To what extent and in what respect do the narratives conserve for us these dynamic and permanent facts of the living Jesus?

To the first part of this question, relating to the extent of our data in the records, we may reply that

they are structurally and spiritually incorporated in the general witness of the Gospels. The records do actually as they stand, and in a massive and pervasive manner, bear communal testimony to the ethical and religious uniqueness of the personality of Jesus. For they were living products of his inner mind and spirit as these were apprehended in personal experiences of faith, and his spiritual portrait is reflected on every page as a historical vitality which quickens and transforms life. This immanent and dynamic element constitutes the very soul of the accounts, and this alone has preserved them from becoming just so many dead documents of history.

We must do justice to the records as facts of literature. Literature is a function of life, and the accounts embody therefore a dynamic and realistic witness of life itself to the spiritual force of the earthly personality of Jesus. No other has yet succeeded in getting himself written about to such an amazing extent, and surely this fact of history articulates life's inherent testimony to the inner greatness of *his* personal life and character. But in any case, the narratives are living fruits and energies and witnesses, in a broad and general sense, of the inner mind and spirit of the earthly Jesus. He lives in them in that he produced them. They are vital reproductions and reflections of his inner character, and they bear existential testimony to his spiritual uniqueness.

The personality of the historical Jesus is reflected in the sources not only in a general way, but also in a specific manner. They provide us with certain casual incidents and expositions, the mere recording of which has supplied that *realistic* element upon

which the spiritual portrait of Jesus in the accounts is concretely and creatively based. This element has served, in a diffusive and pervasive fashion, to establish and to clarify that portrait. To recover these particular features of the records we must keep in mind the fact that the records are composite productions, and that we can detect in them literary strata of different kinds.

Briefly, we can distinguish three kinds of facts in the narratives, all of which combine to produce the spiritual portrait of Jesus reflected in them. They are as follows: first, existential facts; second, religious experiences; third, historical interpretations.

First we have the *existential facts*. They are of two kinds. There are those which refer only to impersonal and external matters. The life and character of the earthly Jesus had of course their historical and empirical framework. We have data relating to his place of birth, to the town in which he was raised, to his family connections, to his trade, to his baptism by John, to his choice of the disciples, to his itinerant ministry of preaching and healing, to his conflict with the Pharisees, to his capture and violent death on the cross. This is by no means a complete list, but it will give us some idea of the kind of facts with which we are now concerned. These confront us with an empirical framework of bare and impersonal existential events which are in themselves of little importance and of no ethical value. For many others were born in Bethlehem, were carpenters by trade, were baptized by John, were preachers and chose disciples, were put to death on a cross, and so forth.

However, side by side with the facts already men-

tioned, and interwoven with them, are others of an existential character which possess vital significance for our present study. These are more or less casual and fragmentary and belong to our earliest and most primitive sources. They relate to the personal behavior and example of the earthly Jesus. They are facts of ethical and religious habits of life which were subconsciously treasured in the memories of the disciples through their daily association with Jesus in the flesh. These refer to the personal and ordinary affairs of everyday life and are recorded without comment. For they neither required, nor lent themselves to, any elaborate process of interpretation, and were thus left unconsciously to make their own inherent witness. They were too ordinary to possess any official value. Such facts are all incidental and fragmentary. They call attention in a casual manner to Jesus' private habits of prayer, to his daily outlook of faith, to his filial devotion to the Father, to his courage and loyalty, to his friendliness and compassion, to his humility and sincerity, to his real and unobscured humanity, to his sacrificial spirit of love.

Second, and in addition to our existential facts, we have also in the narratives a background of *religious experiences*. Some of these find expression in conscious confessions of a detailed character which are related to certain incidents in the career of Jesus (*e.g.* Matt. xvi. 16; Luke v. 8). But most of them are structurally incorporated in the records as basic and pervasive experiences of faith which unconsciously colored all the narrations. They represented spiritual experiences of the Church and of the Evangelists, and they are immanently present in the accounts as diffusive and dynamic energies

and operations of spiritual life. Their witness is the witness of life, and as such it is subconscious and atmospheric.

In both cases, however, the records reflect the inner personality of Jesus in that they illustrate life's assertion of itself. They thus represent its cumulative testimony to the spiritual force and vitality of his personal life and character. Jesus spoke primarily and fundamentally to the hearts and souls of his disciples, and he did this chiefly through the quiet influence of his ordinary life. It was an inner enrichment of life, spiritual redemption, not doctrines, that the early disciples got from Jesus. There are few direct statements to this effect, but the fact is obvious that their religious experiences of Jesus determine and illumine all their estimates of his character and work. Even the writing of the narratives expresses the operation of such experiences in that it represented a dynamic urge of life which was the fruit of a life-enriching experience of Jesus himself. This was and is the very soul of the records, and the personality of Jesus is reflected in terms thereof.

Third, the facts already mentioned are embedded in the accounts within a context of *historical interpretations*. Religious experiences never emerge in the void. They are concrete facts which, as experiences, must find and do find autonomous and indigenous psychological expression in terms of local needs, beliefs, and thought-worlds. Before the Gospel could become a gospel for the day, the disciples had to relate their experiences of Jesus to their own particular environments. Their experience of his uniqueness was fundamentally spiritual. But they had to define this in the language of their age, and

any vital presentation must therefore be both personal and contemporary. Some distinction must thus be made between husk and kernel in the accounts; between the essential message and its temporary formulations; between permanent facts and incidental facts. Historical expositions belong to this latter class. Their character is provisional and they must be considered separately and on their own merits.

What is true in the case of the early disciples applies to the Church and the Evangelists as well. The writers record the story of Jesus in terms of indigenous and contemporary categories, cosmologies, and church programs. Their accounts are colored by certain religious hopes and pious beliefs, by personal idiosyncrasies and apologetic interests. No distinction existed in their age between the natural and the supernatural. They lived and moved in the unscientific realm of the abnormal and portentous. Their interest was largely doctrinal, and doctrine is thus pushed into the foreground. But while this was consciously uppermost, it was dynamically and unconsciously secondary. It is the witness of life that asserts itself in and through all their versatile and autonomous presentations, the witness of a spiritual vitality which brought the records into existence and illuminates all their portrayals. It is this dynamic testimony of life itself, rather than the doctrinal emphases of the writers, that constitutes the permanent and objective element in the accounts.

We must remember that the records were chronologically secondary, and that their concern was not so much with an experience of Jesus as with explanations and interpretations thereof. But the

witness of life is primary and fundamental, and it is unconsciously associated with the memory of Jesus' personal example. Casual and fragmentary incidents are thus recorded which illustrate his private habits of thought and feeling and action. These are left uninterpreted, and they provide us with a first-hand sketch of the mind and spirit of Jesus. Our historical data are in this respect personal facts, facts of ethical and religious habits of life.

This spiritual portrayal of Jesus is immanently and dynamically embodied also, in a broader sense, in the interpreted portions of the accounts. This means that the respective presentations, the four Gospels, do actually as they stand and in their composite character, reflect the inner personality of Jesus. This, indeed, could be adequately reflected only through the medium of local and indigenous interpretations. It is therefore conserved for us in the records in terms of fragmentary and uninterpreted reports, of experiences and evaluations of faith, of historical and contemporary presentations. The three kinds of facts are interwoven in a composite picture which treasures for us the essential features of the earthly character of Jesus.

Our historical data are, accordingly, ethical and religious facts of personal life, dynamic energies and realities of that human personality of Jesus which is compositely reflected in our present sources. This portrayal is wholly unconscious and directed by life itself, and it traces its source and inspiration to the personal religion of Jesus.

#### IV. A NEW APPROACH

The existing situation, with its divergent and conflicting standards of interpretation, reveals the very

urgent need of some new approach to Jesus which shall restore to us the original vitality of appeal and challenge associated with his personal life and character.

No such approach can, of course, be absolutely new; for there is, in this unqualified sense, nothing new under the sun. History has indeed exhausted the various alternatives of approach to Jesus. A new approach may therefore mean no more than one whose methods are comparatively new to our modern world. It may, in fact, assume the form of a return to the past which shall issue in a reëmphasis, a rediscovery, a renaissance, a re-digging of old wells, a restoration of ancestral trails. For an age may divorce itself from history to such an extent as to forget its lessons, and may then set out to live on its own limited resources. Its approaches may, in that case, be modern only in a chronological sense and in name only, while in actual fact they may be as ancient as primitive man. It is indeed a truism of history that there are pathways which have been tried out and condemned by antiquity, and that it is precisely toward these we tend inevitably to drift when we lose our way. Much that is styled modern is thus often no more than a rehash of ideas which history itself has long ago repudiated and discarded in the interests of progress. Such deserve no further consideration.

We do, in either case, manage to go back to the past for our point of departure, and our approaches are in this respect never entirely new. But there is no virtue in a mere return to old paths; for we may obviously strike the wrong trails. The past as past is dead and can never be resuscitated. There is no fixed way that stays fixed. The only real value of an old approach is that it contains for to-day the



potency of a new and living way, and it cannot possess this feature unless it represented in its own world an approach of faith which was personal and indigenous. It was alive only to this extent, and only in this respect can it be intelligently revived and reproduced in our own day as a way of life.

Briefly, then, a new approach for to-day can be new only in the sense that it involves a dynamic and psychological approach of life which is relevant for its own age and world, and which is inspired by the realistic witness of life itself. Our return to the past must therefore be personal and discriminative. It must represent an autonomous and a contemporary return to the testimony of that living past which is spiritually and dynamically ever present.

This is all that is required in any new approach to Jesus. It must establish contact for us with the real Jesus of history through the medium of life and experience. It must do this through respecting life's composite and cumulative testimony to the ethical and spiritual properties of his personal conduct and character. It must reconstruct the past in terms of life, and it must involve a spiritual return of faith which shall recover for us the original and ultimate imperatives of Jesus' ethical personality. No approach, whether old or new, is of any value unless it is spiritually induced and sustained by the living and abiding witness of life itself. Impersonal approaches, traditional and historical and philosophical, are utterly worthless in themselves. They compel us to assume the abstract and artificial rôle of spectators, whereas we are products of that very historical process which we attempt to isolate and appraise. They cannot be trusted to reproduce anything other than mere imaginative constructs

which reflect only their own respective presuppositions.

The Jesus of history can be reconstructed only in terms of life as an ethical fact of behavior. A real approach must be rooted in the soil of our moral nature, and it must respect the objective witness of that moral universe to which we all belong. It must represent an inner response to the self-attestation of life, and it must be alive also as *my* approach in the sense that it is psychologically and spiritually indigenous. As a way it must be a real way, a personal way, a contemporary way, a vitalizing way which involves a spiritual return to reality itself.

But a contemporary and an autonomous approach of life must necessarily resolve itself into an approach of faith. For the witness of life relates to human conduct and character, and these are products of faith. Faith, however, is creative volition and interpretation. The witness of life is thus essentially ethical and psychological in the sense that it involves evaluations which vindicate themselves only through the medium of volitional adventures and explorations of faith. Our response to the testimony of life will thus take the form of free and indigenous appropriations of personal faith. We think with our "habits" and in terms of our behavior. Faith represents a way of life which puts us under the objective power of life itself.

Again, a living approach of faith is applicable only in the case of that which is the product of faith, which begets and stimulates faith, and which as such is psychologically *assimilable* and *reproducible*. It must, as an approach of life, involve a return to the personal life and example of the earthly Jesus, and to this as an imitable fact of ethical habits of

behavior. As an approach of faith it must find its historical data in the personal religion, in the faith-life, in the devotional character, of Jesus as a *man*. For character is a human achievement which is immanently expressed in the casual and the ordinary. The character of Jesus is thus communally reflected in the sources in terms of fragmentary incidents and of general ethical viewpoints and allegiances. Back of the doctrinal framework of the Gospels is the picture of Jesus as truly man among men. Our approach to him must in this respect be preëminently human.

It was the personal and everyday, not the official and exceptional, behavior of Jesus that made the deepest impression upon his first disciples. This gave birth to the Church and sought dynamically to reproduce itself in its fellowship. Jesus continued to live in the "ethics" as well as in the doctrines of the Christian community, and the primary emphasis of the early Church was not metaphysical but ethical and spiritual. Doctrine was wholly secondary; the experiential power and challenge of the religious personality of Jesus came first. The disciples suffered more from the loss of daily fellowship with Jesus than from the blasting of their messianic hopes. But the memory of his personal life was not at first interpretative. It operated, rather, as a subconscious spiritual vitality whose force was such that the disciples found it subsequently possible to ascribe to Jesus the very highest titles which the religious thought of that age had created.

The supreme religious need of to-day is that of a personal and spiritual approach to the living Jesus such as inspired the faith of the early disciples. It must be a way of life which functions only through

experiences and explorations of faith. The new way is in this sense a very ancient one, but it is ever new because it is "a way of life." To know something of the fullness of God in Jesus, to abide in the fellowship of his eternal Spirit—this is a living experience whose point of departure is ever old yet ever new. It implies an actual rediscovery of that way of salvation which is mandatory and ultimate for all alike.

Distinctions between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith have been somewhat overdone. The new approach will evade such an artificial issue by substituting the idea of the living Jesus for that of the risen and exalted Christ. It will do this on the ground that the *real* Jesus never died and could not die! It will emphasize what was fundamental and eternal in Jesus from the very outset of his earthly career. It will interpret the Gospels as dynamic and contemporary products and vehicles of his spiritual personality, a personality which must necessarily reveal itself in terms of historical limitations and personal appropriations of faith. The ideas, sayings, and events of the accounts possess a certain regulative significance for this inner portrait of the living Jesus in the records. But they cannot be so regarded in their literal capacity; their authority is symbolic, not verbal.

It would be absurd to suggest that the earthly life of Jesus was in any way historically unreal, or that we can afford to ignore its empirical factors in the interests of a mystical and an allegorical valuation of the Gospel. Nevertheless, we must emphasize the fact that the personality of Jesus, though truly human, was essentially *spiritual*. It transcended its overt embodiments in the flesh. It alone

gave meaning to his historical career, and its permanent significance for the Gospel resides precisely in those inner qualities of character which death could not and did not touch. The external story of Jesus represented a dramatic and contingent unfoldment of that inner and abiding story of the ever-living Jesus himself. The Gospel that emerged in the garb of the temporal had its seat in the eternal, to which its redemptive secret belongs.

Accordingly, a real approach to the Jesus of history must ultimately concern itself with the actual and cumulative significance of his inner mind and spirit for history itself. It cannot afford to ignore the versatile unfoldments of his personality in terms of the achievements and developments of faith within history. If the witness of life means anything at all, it means that the mind and spirit of the earthly Jesus represent for faith an activity of the living God in history. For the challenge of his personality is essentially ethical and spiritual, and it embodies as such the fundamental and abiding imperatives of the moral order itself.

This treatment of the subject defines the Gospel in terms of its relation to the inner life of Jesus and to that of the believer. Its interpretations are based upon two interrelated facts, that of the spiritual character of Jesus, and that of its self-revelation in experiences of faith. Jesus alone holds the secret of the Gospel. He alone can tell its story to the soul, and he does this only in the fellowship of his indwelling Spirit.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FACTS OF JESUS

#### I. FACTS AND BELIEFS

OUR preceding survey of the historical situation has yielded us at least two constructive results which we shall briefly enumerate.

First, it has made it clear that the fundamental facts of the Gospel are ethical and spiritual realities of life and experience. These are mediated through a contingent and historical system of external sayings and events which are versatily recorded in the accounts in terms of their communal witness. Second, it has centered these realities in the personal life of Jesus as a fact of inner behavior and character whose inherent appeal is to conscience and heart, and whose self-disclosures embody thereby a dynamic revelation of the living God in history and through personality. Our facts are, in these respects, both abiding and authoritative.

It follows that the problem of the Gospel is synonymous with the problem of Jesus, and that this latter is essentially the problem of his spiritual personality. This is to-day, and ever has been, the crux of the Christian Gospel, in virtue of which it possesses whatever properties belong intrinsically to it as a redemptive energy of grace. It constitutes its specific and distinguishing problem. The secret of the records resides not in any overt teachings about

God, man, and the world, which as such can be impersonally and dogmatically catalogued and standardized. It resides, rather, in the ethical and religious fact of Jesus himself. He is dynamically, and interpretatively central for the Gospel. He is its one persistent problem which baffles our minds and haunts our souls. He himself is the mystery. Jesus and the Gospel are thus identical.

Our historical facts are, in short, "facts-of-Jesus," vitalizing and regenerative, which represent and conserve for us the permanent and imperative challenge of his inner mind and spirit. They are realities of that ever-present spiritual order which transcends history and through which the living God forges his gracious appeal *in* history to the spirit of man. What, however, is the precise nature and content of these "facts-of-Jesus"?

Any satisfactory answer to the preceding question must distinguish the facts of Jesus from beliefs about Jesus. Both are to be found in the records, the former being incorporated within the personal and contemporary context of the latter. There are thoughts, speculations, and intellectual evaluations of the sayings and doings of Jesus, all of which represent local and individual attempts to define his unique character in terms of national and cosmic values. These, indeed, were inevitable on the ground that an experience of his power must be autonomous and indigenous, and must therefore articulate itself in terms of relevant values and cosmologies. But the experience itself was a spiritual fact which reflected the spiritual character of Jesus, and this latter constitutes the immanent and abiding witness of the presentations themselves. Their local forms and categories were obviously occasional and tran-

sient, and these elements can be dissociated without much difficulty. There came first a spiritual experience of Jesus, and we must get back to *that*.

The fundamental facts of the Gospel are ultimately facts of Jesus in the sense that they are inner and personal forces of gracious activity which emanate from his living spirit. They are regenerative realities which precipitate moral decisions, beget repentance, and induce faith. Men divided over Jesus and thus bore witness to the fact that it was his spiritual personality which constituted their central problem, a personality whose ethical significance was and is ultimate for conscience and heart. It is, then, the evangelical grace of the personal life of Jesus, dynamically alive in dramatic and redemptive impacts and reactions of faith, that the records confront us with as fundamental for the Gospel. The mind of Jesus is graciously active in them as an energy of humility, of penitence, of holiness, of faith, of truth, of self-sacrifice, of compassion, and of conversion.

Such facts, as realities of the inner behavior and character of Jesus, are living potencies of moral conviction and religious quickening. They fructify in repentance and reconciliation with God, in the witness of sonship, in hope and faith, in the victory over the world, in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. They are all rooted in the recreative soil of ethical and spiritual values and relationships.

The abiding testimony of Jesus is thus related to the imperatives of our moral nature. His unique challenge is formulated in the language of life and experience and it embodies an ever-living appeal to conscience and heart. Our knowledge of him is based upon that personal and redemptive experience



of his grace which is the dynamic of Christian discipleship. All our facts are therefore Christian facts which as such can never be imposed upon the mind from without in the form of standardized beliefs and creeds. They must emerge freely and autonomously as the fruit of fellowship with the spirit of Jesus, and as facts whose realities invite faith but can in nowise coerce it. The Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same in the sense that history is the alembic of spiritual enactments and covenants, the arena of spiritual disclosures and appropriations of faith.

Facts of religious history are often referred to in a very loose way as if they were pure facts. We are usually unaware of the extent to which such so-called facts involve subjective and interpretative modifications of the original data in terms of existing systems of religious beliefs. Our task, in that case, is to distinguish between the primitive substratum of fact and the superstructure of secondary beliefs.

This applies particularly to the facts of Jesus. For these facts are versatily reproduced in the accounts within an environment of local beliefs and thought-worlds, and of personal expositions and presentations. The facts of Jesus must therefore be dissociated from those other facts *about* Jesus, facts of contemporary theologies and cosmologies, through which they are symbolically and presentationally mediated in history. We must get behind all such local concepts and constructions, as indigenous instruments of personal testimony, to that "living experience" which they attempt to describe. We must get back to that redemptive and autonomous witness of the inner life of Jesus which over-

shadows all its local orientations in the accounts, and galvanizes them with a dynamic and mandatory appeal to our moral and religious nature.

It is the permanent witness of Jesus' spiritual character, and not explanations thereof, that constitutes the communal theme and soul of all its presentations in the accounts. This is what is dynamically operative in the formulations themselves, what glows creatively within them and establishes their abiding message and testimony. Our communal facts, as spiritual facts of life and experience, represent intrinsic properties of the inner mind and spirit of Jesus. These are revealed in history in terms of their contemporary contexts and presentations. But their main features stand out in the records with remarkable clearness. These can be discovered in various ways: through their psychological impacts and fruits, through certain processes of elimination, through the witness of spiritual experience, and through reflection upon the specific nature of the immanent challenge of life itself.

The attempt to equate the central facts of the Gospel with any external and standardized system of events, beliefs, and teachings is therefore foredoomed to failure. For the Gospel is intrinsically spiritual and universal. We must, rather, single out and delimit the sphere of those specifically Christian facts, those ethical and spiritual verities of faith and experience, which actually influence our mode of living and express in conduct the divine meanings and operations of the power of Jesus. Thus, and thus only, shall we discover the permanent boundaries of that Gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation."

A real gospel must be universal, and a universal

gospel must be spiritual. It cannot be equated with any statistical system of adventitious beliefs, nor can it be embalmed in historical documents in any literal and dogmatic fashion. A spiritual message can never be hid in an archaic thought-world. It is immanent in all its forms, past, present, and future. It is omnipresent in all its accounts and sequences in history, though it is perceptible only in terms of personal appropriations and experiences of faith. It expresses itself in every age through the medium of local ideas and beliefs, but it can never be identified with any of its contemporary presentations.

The facts of Jesus are spiritual forces which, as distinguished from beliefs about Jesus, are *adaptable* and *transmutable* and *convertible*. They can be expressed in different languages without essential loss, and the fact that they are translatable implies that literal exactness of details is entirely irrelevant and unimportant for the Gospel. Our facts are immanently pervasive and integral in all their presentations. They are expressible in ordinary thought and language and can be formulated in versatile ways. If, therefore, their native sphere is that of spiritual life and experience, then the soul must nourish itself not upon the letter of their contingent contexts in history. It must, rather, find sustenance in that recreative and ever-living spirit which informs and pervades all its local and transient orientations as modes of spiritual life.

Our historical data became facts of *preaching*, and such facts are notoriously symbolic and pictorial. The facts of Jesus can, accordingly, be illustrated in terms of every interest, every occupation, every department of life and experience. They can be unfolded through the medium of every category, every cosmology, every point of view. This is so

because they are facts of human behavior and character. They are therefore in all their molds in the form of psychological incorporations whose witness is specifically individual and presentational.

There is, however, such a thing as "the survival of the fittest" in the world of categories and cosmologies. All our presentations must possess one characteristic in virtue of which they become real and personal presentations. They must represent vital and indigenous concerns of the human spirit in its own age and world. That is, they must be locally and contemporarily alive. This will involve processes of revision and restatement, though no restatement can ever exhaust the content of our abiding facts. The latter are in our presentations, ancient and modern, only as the soul is in the body. They are immanently present within them only as these represent dynamic unfoldments of the living spirit of Jesus which are embodied in impressions of faith, confessions of worth, religious beliefs and speculations, and certitudes of personal redemption.

The facts of Jesus are ultimately inseparable from the "work" of Jesus in our souls and in history. They are fully disclosed only in the guise of redemptive and autonomous potencies and energies of personal and social salvation. This aspect of the subject will, however, be dealt with later on. Our immediate concern is with the central facts of the Gospel as "facts-of-Jesus." What is their exact character?

## II. THE GOOD WILL

In the first place, the "facts-of-Jesus," as facts of his personal life and character, are historical realities of heroic volition.

The character of Jesus, in common with all char-

acter, was a *human achievement*. It was based upon the slow formation of habits of behavior through the free operation of the "good will." For character itself is a fact of self-determining volitions, and habits represent stated modes of thought and feeling and action. But faith is involved in all character in the sense that character is the product of a system of creative volitions, and our facts are in this respect personal forces of courageous faith.

We have already referred to the inveterate tendency, more or less active in every age, to identify the fundamental facts of the Gospel with the empirical sayings and doings, events and traditions, of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. They have been, and are being to-day, equated with his teachings and miracles, with the reputed historical and abnormal facts of his career; and with this external system as it is officially interpreted by the assemblies of the Church. Our infallible facts are then gross facts, impersonal facts, dead facts of a historical past which as such can be neither reëxperienced nor recovered.

This theory involves a certain acceptance of the Gospel narratives as encyclopedic, dogmatic, and standardized accounts. Its results are literally and objectively certified by an oracular canon of inspiration which has converted the records into infallible sources, and has thus set its imprimatur upon all their detailed contexts and contents. Faith is then based upon an unquestioned submission to the verbal authority of these sources. The facts of Jesus thereby become identical with the facts about Jesus. They are facts whose precise character is invariably postulated in advance, and they present us with a conglomerate and hopeless admixture of historical

events, religious valuations, and speculative theories. These are then arbitrarily aggregated and jumbled together in an eclectic system whose values are obviously disparate and adventitious. Ethical, religious, metaphysical, and cosmological ideas jostle one another promiscuously in this dogmatic totality, and are grossly merged therein without respect to their divergent contexts.

When the records are reduced to this cosmopolitan status, and their miscellaneous contents and standards are impersonally massed in this unlicensed fashion, the inevitable result must be controversy and confusion. For this hypothesis virtually resolves the accounts into literal and legal documents whose character is formal and statistical, and is therefore only informational. They will easily lend themselves, on this view, to mutually conflicting estimates and interpretations.

This expository process leaves us actually with no real facts. For the facts of Jesus are now identified with external events and traditions whose exact details are historically contingent and problematic. They are, in that case, matters of speculative and unethical concern. They relate to such highly debatable questions as the virgin birth, miracles, physical resurrection, second coming, and the like, matters which are all ethically neutral and bear no intrinsic relation to the spiritual character of Jesus as a volitional achievement of faith. Jesus is thus no more than a superman; or worse, a demigod! The facts about his essential nature and message are resolved into a spectacular array of extraneous, mechanical, unmoral, thaumaturgical, and hypothetical details of history. The Gospel itself is thereby reduced to a dogmatic deposit of heterono-

mous oracles, and we have no Gospel that shines in its own light. Instead, we are left with only a magical system of pageantry which may indeed dazzle some minds, but which is ethically powerless to convict and convert.

A gospel which needs to be buttressed in this static and artificial fashion, which cannot rest on its own foundations in the ever-living present, which must be subsidized from without by some dogma of infallible inspiration, which is condemned to resort to the futile device of a *deus ex machina* to render it authoritatively inerrant; such a gospel is no gospel at all, but is only a sorry makeshift. A gospel of "events" and "beliefs" tends always to degenerate into formalism, ceremonialism, institutionalism, opportunism, and rank subjectivism. There is very good reason for believing that the facts of Jesus can never be resolved into any official system of historical events and traditions relating to his external career; though, indeed, they were creatively alive therein, and were in this manner contemporarily mediated in history. But they shed their molds as birds shed their feathers in the molting season.

Further, the records do not profess to provide us with any complete system of facts about Jesus. The Evangelists were not mere reporters, biographers, or statisticians whose purpose was to produce exhaustive accounts of the history of Jesus. If this were so, then their respective omissions and divergences clearly indicate that without exception they all failed in their task. For whatever is conserved for us in the records, they certainly do not provide us with adequate data for any "biography" of Jesus. All modern "lives" of Jesus are, in this respect, notorious for their modernity.

What we have in the Gospels are reminiscences, memoirs, appreciations, impressionist sketches, apologetic constructions, and faith-valuations, whose incidents are obviously fugitive and fragmentary. It is evident that the material at the disposal of the writers was incomplete, that they made individual selections from the available traditions, and that personal expositions and embellishments are also involved in the accounts. The facts about Jesus, the empirical events and traditions of his historical career, are thus contingent and fractional, and they exist only in sublimated forms. They are problematic also in the sense that their exact form and content can never be determined with certainty. Their value as such is provisional and impermanent. The real facts transcend all their contemporary events and traditions.

Our investigation is blocked at the very outset unless we can disentangle from the incoherent mass of heterogeneous facts about Jesus those specific and intrinsic facts which alone are relevant and permanent for the Gospel. We must discover some dynamic viewpoint which will invest all our external deposits with their factual meanings and properties, and will explicate for us the essential challenge of Jesus in terms of his inner life and spiritual character.

This is precisely what the records conserve for us. Their communal witness is an immanent spiritual fact which reflects the ethical and religious significance of Jesus for the spirit of man. And this witness is based upon the influence and example of his personal life and religion, his personal conduct and character, as a man. His problem for the records is not thus a metaphysical or cosmological problem



relating to oracular genealogies and cosmic affiliations over which he had no personal control. Neither is it a problem of psychological abnormalities nor of spectacular gestures and performances. Jesus eschewed the abnormal and sensational. He sought and found God in the ordinary circumstances and engagements of life. His problem is autonomously his own, and is a fact not of outward events but of inward resolutions. It belongs neither to the past nor to the future but to the eternal present. It is an ever-living problem of moral character and ethical appeal, of religious faith and redemptive potency. The records leave us in no doubt about this. For the haunting question with which they confront us is not, What do you *think* of Jesus? but rather, What will you *do* with Jesus? His facts are ethically and redemptively interrogative. They are facts of that eternal order which is abiding and ultimate, and they address themselves intrinsically to our spiritual nature.

With regard to the detailed properties of these facts, we have already described them as facts which relate to the personal life of Jesus as a man. We have seen that this aspect of his earthly career is immanently reflected in the accounts in versatile ways.

There is, for instance, the testimony of casual and fragmentary incidents relating to the ethical and religious behavior of Jesus. Some of these illustrate the volitional formation and operation of personal and devotional habits, while others reflect the power of his holy example to convict of sin and to evoke faith. Again, we have the general ethical viewpoints and emphases of the accounts. There is the moral tone of the writers, and there are the ideals

and purposes which they propound and to which they had definitely committed themselves. And further, we have the witness of life which expresses itself in the very composition of the records, and also in their human and personal character as indigenous and contemporary estimates and presentations. All these, taken together, reflect in a realistic and pervasive manner the spiritual influence and power of the ethical and religious example of Jesus.

We cannot accept the reported sayings and teachings of the Gospels as *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. But, surely, they must represent the core and gist of his teachings. They must indicate the spiritual trend of his outlook upon life. They must reflect those psychological habits of thought about God, man, and the world, which Jesus had volitionally achieved through operations and developments of the "good will." Nothing can be more certain than that he had patiently and courageously cultivated a providential view of life, and that this spiritual outlook was the dynamic product of sustained habits of personal conduct based upon heroic adventures of faith. His reported teachings on the subjects of God the Father, of sin and its forgiveness, of sonship and the spiritual kingdom, of the infinite worth of personality, of inner righteousness, of the law of love, certainly represent vital emphases of Jesus himself in his private and public relationships. The disciples got these from Jesus, from his inner mind and spirit, and they reflect the power of his daily behavior and devotional example.

Our present concern, however, is with those inner features of the personal religion of Jesus which illustrate most directly the operations of creative volition and courageous faith. Throughout the

accounts we can detect an immanent emphasis upon ethical and religious virtues of personal character such as sincerity of mind and heart, purity of motive, devotion to the truth, humility and self-sacrifice, pity and love, hope and trust in God. These certainly reflect the personal mind and spirit of Jesus, and they define the nature of those basic "facts-of-Jesus" upon which the Gospel itself is established.

What, however, are the volitional and psychological *implications* of these central facts? How do they affect our interpretation of Jesus and the Gospel?

We have already concluded that our facts are not statutory and statistical items of information which can be impersonally and dogmatically standardized, communicated, and absorbed. They are volitional realities of the inner character of Jesus which can be apprehended only autonomously and in personal experiences of faith. What, indeed, can anyone hope to know of Jesus who has little or no interest in the question of his own personal salvation? What, for example, can anyone who knows little or nothing of prayer itself know of the habits of thought and certitudes of faith inspired by prayer? All our facts are objective energies of personal life which possess their own nature and forge their own intrinsic challenge. They can be known only as they are appropriated and reproduced.

Our fundamental facts, as dynamic properties of the volitional life of Jesus, are essentially forces of personality, creative agencies of conduct and character, courageous energies of faith and freedom. They will never as such submit to private expositions and evaluations. They are self-revelatory, but only in their own atmosphere and on their own terms. Their self-disclosures take place only through

the medium of their own reproductions and self-operations in us. They confront us in the guise of spiritual imperatives which demand that we put ourselves under their power, and which will unfold their inner properties only in responsive assimilations of faith. Their object is to change us, and their precise nature and significance are revealed only as facts of the personal changes which they do actually bring about. They represent realities which are known only in their redemptive effects.

The foregoing conclusion is implied, in some respects, even in the traditional view of the character of Jesus as an innate and a prehistoric heritage, and as something which can be molded in us by supernatural agencies. But all character is human and historical, volitional and personal, and is only as such assimilable and reproducible. It is imitable only as an ethical and a psychological reality which emerges on the plane of history and matures within an environment of human conditions and resources.

This applies to the earthly character of Jesus, to its psychological significances and implications in history and for personality. We can no longer regard that character as a fact of innate substance, of preëxistent and supernatural gifts and heritages. It is rather a product of human volitions and dedications in time and space, which involved an activity of the "good will" in history and as an achievement of history. The volitions of Jesus were autonomous energies of his courageous will of faith. He willed to do the Father's will. But why, it may be asked, did he thus consecrate his life to the service of God? The answer is that he did. That represented his resolute faith-evaluation of life. Behind this we cannot go; for behind lies the unfathomable mys-

tery of self-consciousness, of freedom, of personality itself. To suggest that Jesus did good because he *was* good, and not because he actually chose the good, is to argue in a circle. For goodness is a volitional activity of some kind or other, in which being good and doing good are inseparable elements. In fact, they are dynamically one and the same.

Morality and spirituality arise in history as human and volitional processes and achievements of personal character in time and space. The human sphere is thus fundamental for any investigation of the character of Jesus. To get behind this into some prehistoric and ante-mundane realm is to enter a region where ethical values are for us nonexistent.

Any attempt to establish the "uniqueness" of Jesus upon some innate and preëxistent divine nature, rather than upon his human volitions in history, must inevitably ignore the primary and ultimate character of freedom itself. It must inculcate the deterministic doctrine that all choice is governed by innate properties and native surroundings, and not by human resolution as a creative fiat. It seeks thereby to solve the mystery of personality in terms of something *less* than, and anterior to, the free volitional activity of personality itself. Character becomes then a fact of heteronomous heritages, not of autonomous volitions. We maintain, however, that it is an expression of the "good will," and not of this as a genealogical entity but as a psychological activity in history. All goodness begins and ends in the sphere of volition, and is an ethical fact of faith and freedom.

The facts of Jesus, as facts of his inner character, are therefore ethical and religious facts of spiritual volition and courageous faith. They were fruits of

holy resolutions, of unceasing communion with God, of unreserved obedience to His will. But volition means faith, and faith means volition. Both involve risks. Holy volition is a creative activity which has to overcome refractory elements in the body and in its surroundings. It is never natural, never easy, never automatic. Some strain is implied, some effort which calls for self-discipline, endurance, persistence, and self-sacrifice.

This was so in the case of Jesus. And being so, there must have been some legitimate self to deny, to sacrifice, in the interests of a higher self. This latter must have been an object of achievement based upon personal choice. And choice is, in turn, never easy or mechanical, nor is it regulated from without. It is a matter of free, spiritual determinations which involve real alternatives, real inward strain and conflict. The brief career of Jesus illustrates this fact. What, otherwise, was the meaning of those lonely vigils, those groanings and agonies, those cryings and tears, those night-long prayers on the mountain top? He "*learned* obedience by the things which he suffered," and only thus has he become "the author of eternal salvation" for us men (Heb. v. 8-9).

A static divine nature would have its task magnified and defined accordingly. It would involve greater tasks and responsibilities, it would demand achievements worthy of its heritage, it would tax its resources to the very utmost. But this means that the element of creative choice would still be the final arbiter. There would still be temptations to overcome, obstacles to be negotiated, recalcitrant material to be molded, risks to be undertaken, goals to be achieved. Goodness itself is a fact of persistent

effort, resolute endurance, unremitting conflict, holy adventure, creative sublimation. Goodness, from the human viewpoint, is hard for God Himself, and He can be good on no other terms! Creative activity in any world must ever be heroic volitional activity. For the dead weight of things is against it. It must pull against the stream, and that stream is a fact of the human order as a reality of material limitations and conditions. Heroic adventure is the only law of progress.

We conclude, then, that Jesus was good because he formed habits of goodness, because he chose to do the right and to serve only the will of God. He did this deliberately, he counted the cost, he bore all the consequences, he finished his work. The uniqueness of Jesus is the fruit of brave decisions, of self-denial and self-sacrifice, of prayer and faith. He chose to live in this manner. It was a venture of faith whose issues were as such rationally precarious and uncertain. It was a hard and heart-breaking path that he trod, and there was the possibility of losing out in the end.

Jesus must receive credit for the life that he lived, and the admission of its intrinsic worth constitutes the basic truth which is involved in any real confession of his deity as the only-begotten Son of God. Such was his high estimate and demand of life, such were the terms upon which he was ready to go on with it, that he staked all on a hazard of faith. Through his holy and heroic volitions, through his steadfast and unadulterated faith, God made Himself progressively known to him as the Father of all grace in whose strength and favor he went forth unflinchingly even unto the cross. He has thereby wrought out for humanity a spiritual revelation of

God which is historically alive and complete. This means not merely that Jesus has for men the "value" of God, but that his personality represents the dynamic and ultimate forthputting of God Himself in history.

Our facts are therefore forces of personal character, volitional and courageous energies of spiritual life, which as such are assimilable and reproducible realities of ethical and religious experience.

### III. CERTITUDES OF FAITH

Again, the "facts-of-Jesus," as facts of his heroic faith and volition, are perceptual realities of perfect sonship.

They are spiritual fruits of communion with God, and they involve free evaluations which fructify in insights and teachings whose certitudes are certitudes of faith which are maintained by faith. They are, consequently, never free from risks, never demonstrable in the accepted sense, and are never anything other than facts of faith.

The theory that our central facts are empirical events has been paralleled in history by the view that they are "universal ideas." This conception has emerged as a protest against an external gospel of mere sayings and doings, and its ostensible purpose has been to equate the revelation of Jesus with its ethical and religious ideas. It therefore resolves our fundamental facts into teachings of Jesus about God the Father, the infinite value of the human soul, the brotherhood of man, the kingdom of inner righteousness, the service of love, and so forth. Our facts are, for the first view, discrete and extraneous events; while, for the second, they are detached and universal ideas which can subsist and function in



their own right. Apparently little or nothing has been learnt, on the one hand, of the essential inwardness of all moral appeal, and, on the other hand, of the utter impotence of all abstract ideas.

In both cases, the Gospel would be de-personalized and reduced to a formal and lifeless entity. For the one, it would resolve itself into an eclectic conglomeration of nebulous facts and dogmas; for the other, into a medley of floating ideals and formulas. Both theories would wrench the Gospel from its historical and psychological context in life as a concrete and vitalizing energy of spirit embodied in the personal character of Jesus and reproduced in the communal witness of his followers. Both would remain without objective content, without soul or body.

We have seen that, while there are regulative events for the Gospel, they are actually regulative not in their contingencies but only in their revelatory character. Their significance is historical not in any gross empirical sense, but only as symbolic and spiritual facts. They belong essentially to a hierarchical system of meanings and values, in whose light alone they shine as contingent and contemporary reflectors of a communal Gospel. The events themselves were all circumstantial, but their revelation is permanent and universal. Our facts can in no possible way be identified with their casual determinations in history. Least of all can we raise upon this adventitious foundation of events any dogmatic and immutable system of doctrine.

Facts which are merely historical, and ideas which are merely universal, must inevitably lend themselves to private and subjective expositions and evaluations. Their concrete content will invariably

be imported into them in terms of our mental and moral resources and habitudes.

It is necessary, therefore, not only to distinguish the facts of Jesus from their local and empirical embodiments in events, but also to dissociate them from that psychological context of ideas and beliefs which determined their contemporary orientations. Some of these meanings are obviously speculative and apologetic, and were thus only provisional. But others are devotional and confessional, and thus permanent. In actual fact, all universal ideas are pure abstractions, figments of the imagination. All ideas tend to become *my* ideas. Their concrete properties represent in practice *my* psychological evaluations of life. It is always, then, as local facts, as personal facts, that ideas confront us in history, and it is only in that capacity that we shall consider them here.

Frequent attempts have been, and are being, made to equate the Gospel of Jesus with an ethical and idealistic philosophy of life based upon the Sermon on the Mount. It has been resolved into a vague affair of moral maxims and ideas and formulas, such as have already been referred to: ideals of fatherhood, brotherhood, righteousness, love, service, self-sacrifice, and the like. And in these doctrines, with their corollaries of "dying to live" and "living to serve," we are assured that the very essence of the Gospel resides. Then we go on to subject these ideas to private interpretations which are hopelessly divergent and divisive. Instead of appraising them in terms of their concrete and objective realities, we dissolve those realities themselves in a vat of standardized ideas whose content is variously supplied by our own personal viewpoints and valuations. We

have in actual practice to fall back for our empirical contents upon our own psychological habits of life, and all our beliefs are then dictated and subsidized by our practice.

The facts of Jesus are in nowise identical with their dominant ideas, ethical or otherwise. For we have seen that ideas can tell us little or nothing. They are formal and impotent and utterly destitute of any concrete and dynamic content. What meanings they possess are inevitably imported into them, with the result that they deteriorate into nebulous generalizations which endorse all manner of mutually conflicting beliefs and practices.

The Gospel is a "way of life," not a formalized and standardized system of ethical and religious doctrines. This is so whether we interpret these doctrines philosophically in terms of universal ideas, or historically in terms of contemporary cosmologies. In both cases, our actual concrete contents are local and subjective, and their problem is therefore one and the same. Both theories, that which universalizes the ideas of the Gospel and that which canonizes them as they stand, are based upon an *epistemological* conception of the origin of their respective ideas. For the one, they are intuitive products of some static "moral nature" which can look after itself; for the other, they are clairvoyant fruits of some spiritistic "divine nature" through which Jesus communicated to men an immutable and infallible revelation of God.

An epistemological gospel must sooner or later, and consciously or unconsciously, do one of two things. It must pass through historicism to agnosticism, or it must seek refuge in oracles. The results for faith will be the same in both cases.

With regard to the second tendency, that of resorting to oracles, it culminates in a view of the Gospel for which its contents are informational and encyclopedic. It vindicates all the ideas found in the records: ethical, geological, physiological, cosmological, and so forth. The Gospel, on this reading, is not inherently a fact of ethical and religious properties whose appeal is direct to conscience and heart. It represents, rather, a body of knowledge relating to ante-mundane and post-mundane matters, with forecasts of history in between, all guaranteed by a supposed epistemological unity of Jesus with God Himself. The divine nature of Jesus and the revelation of God in Jesus are thus facts of omniscience and omnipotence, and are thereby reduced to the infertile level of intellectual curiosities and monstrosities. They are not dynamic realities of spiritual life and are therefore utterly destitute of ethical and religious qualities.

Suffice it to say that the sphere of the records is not epistemological or scientific in the accepted sense, but is specifically ethical and religious. Mere information, even though that be dubbed religious, lies outside their scope. Cosmologies, physiologies, geologies, theologies, abound therein. There are also sociological items of knowledge relating to phases of a civilization which is now entombed in history. The records were, in these respects, vital and indigenous products of contemporary life.

All the aforementioned data of the accounts certainly possess some value for us. But by no stretch of the imagination can this be regarded as central and fundamental. They do not represent absolute and authoritative disclosures of the mind of God. Their exact content is both provisional and problem-

atic. Religious experience does involve local incorporations; for it actually emerges within a psychological environment of contemporary beliefs and customs which are occasional and ephemeral. But the "ologies" are all incidents, not essentials, of religion. They are passing forms, not permanent realities, of religious faith and fellowship.

No epistemological concepts can do justice either to the divine nature of Jesus or to his revelation of the Father. Jesus was not a "medium," and his Gospel was not a spiritistic affair of cosmic knowledge. His unity with God was ethical and spiritual, and the knowledge of God which he mediated was therefore of this character. It was not an intellectual and a cosmological "plan of the ages" that he revealed, and revealed automatically in virtue of some innate nature which shared the intellectual secrets of God. It was rather an ethical and a religious knowledge that he communicated, a knowledge which was not static and oracular but was the developing fruit of spiritual behavior. It was thus human and historical, volitional and perceptual, in its nature and origin. It was an achieved psychological product of holy living in time and space. It was unfolded in terms of life and experience through the medium of heroic adventures of faith. It was, in the strict sense, not a fact of knowledge at all, but of personal faith.

It follows from this that the teachings of Jesus were not unfoldments of mere ideas whose meanings can be philologically and historically unearthed, in some dogmatic fashion, through a study of his reputed utterances relating to God, man, and the world. For one thing, no such *ipsissima verba* of Jesus can possibly be recovered or guaranteed at this

late date. Again, the same is true of the self-revelation of his person in terms of his reported sayings about himself. No mere exegetical results based upon selected texts, words, or phrases can take us very far in this matter.

The secret of Jesus was never embalmed in verbal terms or propositions such as the "Son of Man," the "Christ," the "Son of God," the "Messiah," and other expressions bearing upon his sovereign claims and his oneness with the Father. The self-revelation of Jesus did not proceed in terms of his teachings as literal and epistemological facts. This being so, an appeal to mere words and texts will be fruitless and futile. For even certified sayings would never submit to historical or dictionary expositions. They would never yield their hidden meanings to some impersonal and dogmatic process of exegetical and historical research. The results of such inquiries must necessarily be hypothetical and problematic, while faith must find its sure basis in spiritual visions and certitudes.

The facts of Jesus, as creative and historical facts of spiritual volition and behavior, fructified in perceptual insights, intuitions, and convictions of faith. His teachings were dynamic expressions in language of psychological realities of spiritual experience, and their real significance can be grasped only in a fellowship of spirit. They were not epistemological and cosmological dicta. They represented personal facts of inner conduct and character, personal insights and certitudes of faith.

In consequence, we cannot regard the teachings of Jesus as products of some innate metaphysical nature which held in repose the panoramic secrets of the universe, whose range was thus encyclopedic

and whose properties were grossly thaumaturgical. They were, on the contrary, perceptual fruits of that spiritual behavior which was based upon unceasing communion with God, and which culminated in perfect sonship. The revelation of Jesus was a volitional and spiritual reality of ethical and religious certitudes of faith which emerged in fellowship with the Father and were sustained through the doing of His will. Jesus' knowledge of God was the knowledge of a "son." It was the intuitional fruit of filial obedience to God.

Jesus knew God in the only way in which God, who is "a Spirit," can be known. That is, he knew Him through inner communion, holy adventure, and the obedience of faith. This latter, more especially, is the organ of all spiritual knowledge. John's Gospel rests this view upon the authority of Jesus himself. For, in answer to a question relating to the source of his wisdom, Jesus is reported to have said: "If any man will *do* his will, he shall *know* of the doctrine" (John vii. 17). These words may not represent the exact utterance of Jesus. But there can be no doubt that they indicate the basic principle of his religious teachings, that they illustrate features of his personal experience, and that they yield us thereby a passing glimpse of the hidden processes of his inner life. We have in them a transcript of the secret of his own soul. They are enough to convince us that Jesus' revelation of God was wrought out in the crucible of heroic conflicts and dedications, that it was concerned with religious certitudes which were the products of faith, of communion, of consecration, of sonship.

Such adjustments of spiritual behavior are always followed by perceptual insights of faith, by inner

unfoldments of the living God, by divine assurances and certitudes which faith holds as true though all else be false. This knowledge is, however, never anything more than a knowledge of faith. The facts of Jesus are thus psychological realities of personal faith, of ethical insight and religious vision; facts of freedom, of fellowship, of holy behavior, of perfect sonship.

#### IV. THE GLAD TIDINGS

Finally, the "facts-of-Jesus," as facts of his spiritual communion and sonship, are social realities of divine grace.

These facts involve a dynamic and an objective operation of the living God in history. For certitudes of faith are not speculative and subjective things; they are not mere ideas or opinions. They emerge as fruits of fellowship with God and they represent living energies and unfoldments of the divine presence in life and experience. They are not theories of God, but are manifestations and declarations of God Himself within the soul. Through them His nature and power are revealed and His nearness is assured as a real fact of experience. He becomes thereby manifest "in the flesh," and we can know Him and find peace in His fellowship. This is the ground of the "glad tidings": "Emmanuel—God with us!"

Because such certitudes of faith are rooted in the soil of ethical and religious behavior, they are the same for all like types of conduct and character. They disclose a certain fixity, uniformity, and universality which invest them with objective and social properties; "for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. x. 12). Hence



arises the idea of a spiritual and social kingdom, objective and universal, whose character is defined in terms of the ethical and religious behavior that perceives it and brings it to light, and whose living message is reflected in those particular assurances which emerge as certitudes of faith. It must, then, be a kingdom of ethical and religious forces and values; a kingdom of righteousness and truth and grace, through which the God of all grace makes known the glad tidings to all who will seek His fellowship.

The good news of the Gospel cannot remain a private possession, for good news is essentially propagative. It had, therefore, its proclaimers, and it issued in social campaigns. These called attention to the actual presence and power of the living God in life and history, and sought thereby to extend the kingdom of divine grace upon earth. Certitudes of faith thus involved social and dynamic declarations and unfoldments of the mind and will of God, of His power and grace, in the hearts of men.

Jesus was the first preacher of the Gospel, and he associated it with the kingdom of God. The revelation of God proceeded in terms of this kingdom, and the good news was the good news of the kingdom. This kingdom is therefore central for the "glad tidings," and the kingdom is a social and redemptive reality of divine grace.

The kingdom of God has been subjected to many divergent interpretations. All of these, however, unite in basing its content upon the "teachings" of Jesus. Hence their diversity. The good news was thus an economic fact, or an apocalyptic fact, or an ethical fact, or a mystical fact, or a thaumaturgical fact. Its burden was social reform here and now, or

the final triumph of righteousness in some remote future, or the inculcation of universal principles of conduct and character, or the reality of immediate and ecstatic communion with an immanent God, or the unfoldment of an oracular program of magical and supernatural invasions of history. All these views have their respective exponents and representatives within the Church to-day.

We are concerned at present only with the last view, the thaumaturgical, which is popularly but wrongly referred to as the "evangelical" conception of the kingdom. This identifies the good news with certain doctrinal deposits and with some standardized plan of salvation. It rightly associates the blessings of the Gospel with the fact of repentance, the forgiveness of sins, the new birth, the fellowship of believers, and the central reality of the Father's love. But it mixes up such facts and experiences with irrelevant dogmas, finds their ground in literal teachings of Jesus, and bases the experiences themselves upon the unquestioned acceptance of some dogmatic system of beliefs. Its spiritual emphases are thus neutralized by its medieval postulates and alliances, and the result is a "new legalism."

All legal constructions of the Gospel are ultimately material, reactionary, and individualistic. Each man must, and does, import his own meanings into them, and all such are mutually exclusive. They leave us, therefore, just where we were. In the last analysis, they will serve only to vindicate *my* beliefs, *my* practices and habits of life, whatever these may happen to be. They are devices whose unconscious aim is to secure a standardized gospel which will endorse things-as-they-are, which will legalize and subsidize the spiritual life so that

its interests can be protected without the strain of unceasing consecration and adventurous living. Such expositions of the Gospel would resolve the records into an esoteric armory of proof-texts, a private arsenal of immutable dogmas, a soulless system of casuistry. All sorts of contradictory propositions can, on this reading, be proved and defended with chameleon-like dexterity, and individualism then engages individualism in internecine and fratricidal warfare. Confusion and controversy rend the air.

The logical issue of legalism is subjectivism. Private distortions and perversions of the message of Jesus emerge in this atmosphere, which serve only to perpetuate all our conflicting estimates and partisanships. They are inspired by static ideas, by fixed habits of character, which reflect only what *we* are and can never as such fathom the secret of Jesus himself. Such ingrained ideas, mental twists, and moral obstinacies must bear the blame for a veritable host of diversified misconceptions and falsifications of the Gospel. So many minds, so many opinions, and the individual mind becomes thereby the measure of all things.

The facts of the kingdom are not subjective but objective. Their properties are uniform, but they will disclose themselves in terms only of their transformative effects. They demand certain changes in us, certain adjustments of mind and spirit, before we can get the right point of view. An objective gospel can be apprehended only through the medium of its own self-revelations. But these proceed in terms only of its self-operations in us, so that certain modifications of character are both the instruments and the prerequisites of enlightenment. New creations of thought and life must be established, new

habits of character inspired by the power of Jesus in personal experiences of faith must be in constant process of formation. It is only in this environment of spiritual renewal that the real facts will release their inner meanings and potencies. They will define themselves only in the language of those redemptive results, those dynamic changes, which they actually establish in us when we come under their power.

Any attempt, therefore, to identify the facts of the kingdom with the "teachings" of Jesus must invariably end in literalism, legalism, and utter confusion. The theory on which it is based will compel each one of us to fall back upon our own private resources for reconstructions of those teachings, and their concrete content and significance will thus be determined from without by fixed habits of thought and practice. But the teachings themselves will never respond to such treatment. Their facts are not static, impersonal, informational, and dogmatic. They are, rather, dynamic, recreative, inspirational, personal, and cumulative forces of spiritual life which can never be standardized.

Again, we cannot now recover, with any certainty, the local and casual contexts of the teachings of Jesus. But their character, apart from these, is only formal. They will not, on that account, yield us any immutable and infallible interpretations. Indeed, as mere informational sources, their values and meanings for us will inevitably be regulated by our own individual apperceptions and apprehensions. Their objective significance, on the other hand, as redemptive realities of the inner behavior and character of Jesus, will unfold itself in terms only of their ethical and religious operations

in us when we respond to the appeal of Jesus. We may observe also that the teachings of Jesus were not, as teachings, entirely new to the world of his day. Their germs are in the Old Testament, and they involve developments of prophetic ideals and teachings. They do not constitute the good news of the kingdom of God.

What, then, are the "glad tidings" of the kingdom? Before we can discover their precise nature, we must first determine the fundamental character of the kingdom itself in the teachings of Jesus as these are known to us.

We maintain that the essence of that kingdom was not, for Jesus himself, either economic, or apocalyptic, or merely ethical, or mystical, or thaumaturgical. Some of these ideas may undoubtedly have found a place on the fringe of his religious outlook, but they were certainly not central. The kingdom of God was for Jesus inherently personal and spiritual. It was, and is, a dynamic reality of the spiritual order of life, an inner and ever-present fact and force which transcends all its outward history. It is the realm of all ethical and religious values and resources, the sphere of that divine grace whose blessings are bestowed upon us as free and unmerited gifts. The messianic idea did not exhaust the content of the kingdom for Jesus. It is much truer to say that he transformed that idea, in common with other local and contemporary ideas, by putting it on a spiritual basis.

Ultimately, the kingdom of God represented that all-encompassing environment of life itself, that infinite and exhaustless fountain of all hope and faith, which sustains and renews our souls. Its powers are never achieved merely by human effort.

They are by-products of spiritual aspiration, spiritual vision, spiritual fellowship; fruits of volitional attitudes, explorations, assimilations, and dedications. Such powers are mediated through ethical and religious behavior, in that this guarantees those receptive and responsive conditions under which their self-operations and self-unfoldments take place. But they are objective properties of that divine and invisible order which is the source of all spiritual life, and in which "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). The Beatitudes illustrate the laws and processes of this order; the meek shall inherit the earth, the pure in heart shall see God (Matt. v. 5, 8). Trust, prayer, obedience, filial devotion and spiritual adventure are its instruments and channels.

The kingdom, as an invisible and ever-present spiritual order, is thus a living and abiding reservoir of spiritual life. Its resources are recuperative and regenerative, and its approach to us represents an advance of grace. It provides for that renaissance of soul, that new creation of life, which is based upon repentance and faith; in whose environment the forgiveness of sins, the fact of sonship, the victory over the world, eternal life in the present, become vital realities of Christian faith and experience.

Such, in bare outline, was Jesus' inner conception of the kingdom of God. It was a spiritual and an inclusive reality whose character was essentially ethical and religious, and whose apprehension was a fact of courageous faith. This idea did not originate with Jesus. He inherited it from the faith of his fathers, and it came to him more especially through the teachings of the Prophets. So also of his view of this spiritual order as both personal and paternal,

as a kingdom of God the Father. All these ideas had already a history before the days of Jesus. He did not begin at the very beginning, and there is therefore no trace in his psychological processes of any attempt to investigate, or to build upon, ultimate origins. Jesus accepted the heritage of the Law and the Prophets, and we must begin where he did.

The kingdom of God was progressively unfolded in history, and was finally revealed and heralded as the kingdom of the Father. But it was always the kingdom of the Father, and it was all that it was to Jesus from the very beginning. However, it had to be discovered and manifested as such through the medium of personal experience; for discovery and revelation are but two sides, two aspects, of the same process. The disclosures of this kingdom in the past were, indeed, both fugitive and fragmentary. But there were real glimpses of its true character in the prophetic writings. It is more than probable that the religious convictions of Jesus on this question were stimulated and strengthened through pondering the words of the Prophets.

How, then, was the revelation of God the Father, as a living reality of human experience, actually discovered and unfolded in history? We reply that it emerged originally in the form of certitudes of faith which developed into teachings of faith. These, in turn, were intuitive fruits of ethical and religious volitions and dedications, of heroic evaluations and adventures of faith. They represented spiritual perceptions which were rooted in a certain type of behavior and character. Jesus could not fail to apprehend this fact in the case of the Prophets. The story of their stormy careers would make it clear

to him that their visions of God were products of devotional daring and courageous faith. Hence the fundamental principle, embodied in his teachings, that all revelation proceeds in terms of ethical and religious consecration.

The case of Jesus was no exception to this rule. On the human side, he discovered the kingdom of the Father in all its fullness through those certitudes of faith which emerged as fruits of unique devotional behavior and perfect sonship. These certitudes found overt expression in and through the public teachings of Jesus. On the divine side, the kingdom of the Father was self-unfolded by the Father Himself, and this disclosure was made possible by the fact that He found in the personal life of Jesus, in his inner mind and spirit, a unique and perfect channel through which His spiritual self-revelation could be historically matured.

We cannot, then, equate the revelation of the kingdom with the "teachings" of Jesus. For this kingdom was not primarily an affair of mere ideas, and it did not originate in that manner. It was a vital reality of life, and life always precedes and conditions all our thinking. Thought is but a function and reflection of life, and all its facts refer back to experience itself for their values and interpretations. The intellectual statement and program of the kingdom represented dynamic expressions in language of certitudes of faith which were perceptually rooted in the personal behavior and character of Jesus. This kingdom is therefore a fact of the personality of Jesus, and its inner revelation as a living reality of faith proceeds in terms not of his teachings but of his devotional spirit and example. It is the spiritual character of Jesus, not his sayings, that reflects in



history the kingdom of the Father. God is not like teachings, God is like *Jesus*: He "hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son" (Heb. i. 2). Jesus brought the kingdom in bringing himself, and he is the kingdom.

Accordingly, the nature of the kingdom of God is fully and finally revealed as the kingdom of the Father only in the personal life and religion of Jesus. It is his inner mind and spirit, not what he taught, that constitute the fundamental basis of this unfoldment in history. The kingdom inheres in Jesus himself, and its properties are reflections of his own personal character. "Grace" was the one distinctive element in the Gospel of Jesus, and he unveiled the Father as the God of all goodness and grace. This was so precisely because grace was the characteristic feature of his own behavior and personality, the grace that was bestowed and assimilated in communion with the Father Himself: "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John i. 17).

We are now in a position to define the character of the "glad tidings." Their constituents are not mere ideas and words and teachings, and they do not involve any external and oracular system of immutable and infallible edicts. They are, rather, as the good news of the kingdom, versatile statements in language of the experiential properties of that kingdom; and their content reflects thereby the content of the kingdom.

We have already concluded that the kingdom of the Father is an inner and a spiritual reality of personal life, and that it is unfolded in history in terms of insights and convictions of faith which are rooted in habits of devotion and of communion with God. We have also found, more particularly, that

the properties of the kingdom were original properties of the spiritual character of Jesus. All this is true, therefore, of the "glad tidings" of the kingdom. If they reflect the kingdom, and if the kingdom in turn reflects the personal life of Jesus, then it follows that the "glad tidings" represent realities of faith which were concretely rooted and embodied in the holy personality of Jesus. And if Jesus himself is the kingdom, then he is also the "good news," the Gospel, of the kingdom.

The "glad tidings" became a historical reality only when the kingdom emerged in the soul of Jesus. They were facts not of teachings but of personality. The Gospel of the Father is thus dynamically and historically the Gospel of Jesus in the dual sense that he made it his own before he preached it, and that the Father is spiritually embodied only in the personal life of Jesus; "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9). The Gospel was not talked; it was *acted* and lived! Jesus heralded it not in mere words and teachings, but by what he was in himself. It was his life, his unique character, that preached the Gospel of the Father. All through his brief career Jesus showed the Father to men by deeds of holy devotion and loving service. They in turn found the Father as they responded to Jesus in personal experiences of repentance and faith.

Jesus went far beyond all his predecessors in his heroic and perfect consecration to the holy will of God. He paid the price for a full and final revelation of the Father, so that this revelation must from henceforth ever be centered in his unique personality. Jesus discovered that the kingdom was the kingdom of the Father in all His fullness just because

the filial spirit unfolded it as a social and redemptive reality of divine grace.

Two conclusions follow therefrom. First, Jesus, through his perfect sonship, played the part of the Father in life. Through his holiness, his faith, his courage, his self-sacrifice, his forgiving spirit, his service to men, his redeeming grace, he released the actual dynamic operations of the Father in human life. Jesus brought the Father near to men, induced penitence and faith, established hope and trust, led men to the Father whom to know is life eternal (John xvii. 3). He is thus the way to the Father and the only way of salvation, and the good news of the kingdom becomes essentially the Gospel of Jesus the *Savior* (Luke ii. 11). Second, Jesus, through his unique character, embodied the spiritual presence and power of the living God in history. He is the Word of God, the Word made flesh, God "manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. iii. 16).

Ultimately, the "facts-of-Jesus" are personal and social forces of spiritual influence, example, and character. They are facts of worth, facts of significance, facts of his saving work in the hearts of those who yield to his sway, facts of faith whose meanings are hidden in their redemptive results. They are vitalizing realities of divine grace, facts and energies of eternal life, which are operative in personal renewals and are unfolded in confessions of saving grace.

## CHAPTER III

### THE COMMUNAL PORTRAIT

#### I. REPRESENTATIVE VIEWS

AN impartial reading of the Gospel narratives will make it clear to us that their fundamental facts are centered in the personality of Jesus, and that these represent intrinsic properties of his inner mind and spirit.

The vital interest of the records is neither theological nor philosophical, but personal and religious. They are ethical productions based upon the spiritual character of Jesus. They are "living traditions" whose primary concern is with that communal portrait of Jesus which glows in all their pages, illuminates and vitalizes all his sayings and doings, and reflects his power and grace in the faith and fellowship of his followers. The records confront us with luminous, graphic, and dramatic accounts of the living Jesus, now unfolding himself in speech and action, now in the transformed lives of those who honored his challenge and loved him to the end.

Several lines of proof converge toward the support of this particular thesis. They are all based upon the historic witness of the New Testament, wherein both the inspiration and the charter of the Gospel are officially explicated and made known to us. Our present concern is only with the communal testimony of the four Gospels. What, we may ask, are

the characteristics which are common in their respective portrayals of the Jesus of history? What regulative features within each of the accounts govern their uniform appraisal of his unique personality?

We may reply that the records confront us with many portraits of Jesus, all more or less common. These are usually referred to as the apocalyptical, the prophetic, the humanitarian, the thaumaturgical, the mystical, and the evangelical. This, however, is only a rough classification.

Conceptions of Jesus and the Gospel based upon the preceding ideas find some measure of support in the accounts themselves. But these diversified portraits are not all on a par. They are not all equally common. They are not all mutually exclusive, they are not all primary and ultimate. For instance, the truly evangelical portrait may include all the others in the sense that it determines their inner and permanent values and significances. Apocalypticism, propheticism, humanitarianism, thaumaturgicism, mysticism, are all facts and phases of life and experience themselves. The only question is, How are they to be interpreted? Cosmologically, moralistically, sociologically, magically, theosophically, or spiritually? There is all the difference in the world between these respective approaches, and their results must therefore be mutually divergent and contradictory. This is due to the fact that we build our hypotheses upon isolated incidents and utterances, import meanings into events and movements which fail to do justice to their inner realities, and ignore the fact that all processes of life are ultimately personal and spiritual.

Such differences do actually exist, and they are based upon exclusive and conflicting views of the communal witness of the Gospels relating to the personal life of Jesus. Before we proceed to interrogate the records themselves, we shall refer briefly to three representative interpretations which are more or less popular in the theological world of to-day and which demand some consideration.

First, there are those who regard the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels as that of a *super-human being*. These are impressed by the accounts of his miraculous origin, his miraculous control of nature, and his miraculous triumph over the grave. Jesus is a superman or a demigod.

This theory emphasizes the "essential" deity of Jesus, postulates some metaphysical distinction of innate substance between him and all other men, and tends thereby to reduce his humanity to an utter phantasm. The supernatural is thus equated with the ultra-human and thaumaturgical. Clearly, this view is the product of a literal and subjective reading of the accounts, of a grossly mechanical conception of the miraculous, and of an external estimate of religion itself. But by what right do we identify the supernatural with the sensational and spectacular? All creation, all life, as the developing work of God, is immanently miraculous. The supernatural belongs essentially not to the sphere of external things, but to the inner realm of spiritual values and triumphs. It is a fact not of the abnormal and magical, but of the psychological creations of the Holy Ghost in receptive and responsive hearts.

All such theories of the nature of Jesus are based upon a conception of the supernatural which is sub-

jective, mechanical, and naturalistic. It is imported into the records and is the fruit of private views and valuations of life and history. Its logical issue is a practical skepticism which seeks refuge either in infallible oracles or in mythical gospels; either in a blind deification of the historic Jesus or in a blank denial of his historic existence. Jesus is nonhuman in both cases.

Second, others identify the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels with that of a *unique teacher*. He was an ethical and a religious teacher, and his ethics were steeped in religion itself. To describe him, therefore, as a mere moral idealist would be entirely inadequate. He was fundamentally a man of God, a prophet of God, an interpreter of life and religion.

This school maintains that the Gospel is not inherently related to the person of Jesus. It was, rather, the Gospel of the Father, of His paternal love and care; though this involved also the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. It was, in short, a humanitarian Gospel. Advocates of this view emphasize the dependence of Jesus upon the Father, the ethical character of his teaching as a doctrine of "inner righteousness," the social implications of his democratic ideals, and the religious significance for to-day of his contemporary message and mission. They build largely on the parabolic and the specifically ethical sayings of Jesus which define the nature of the kingdom in terms of the ordinary processes and relationships of life—of the growing seed, of human principles of right conduct, of moral maxims and imperatives whose range is inclusive and whose authority is immutable and ultimate.

Exponents of this theory distinguish not only

between the passing and the permanent in the records, but also between the historic Jesus and the abiding Gospel. He can, by stripping him of all local entanglements, be recovered for the life of to-day as a unique teacher of the universal Gospel. The portrait of Jesus is thus modernized and brought up to date. But has it not suffered somewhat in this process? Has it not actually lost its identity? Some indeed maintain that it has been torn from its living context in history and has been touched up to square with modern ideas.

Third, another group, the youngest and most adventurous, recognizes in the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels the characteristic features of a *Jewish messiah*. He was an apocalyptic seer who gathered up the traditional hopes of his people, infused them with new spirit, and linked them with his messianic vocation.

The first view invested Jesus with the metaphysical nature and attributes of the deity, and confined this invasion of God to a particular period in history. The second view resolved Jesus into a prophetic teacher who emerged in history, but who transcends history in virtue of the universal properties of his ethical and religious teachings. The third view, now under consideration, reduces Jesus to the status of an Oriental messiah. He will not, on this reading, fit into our modern world. His outlook was such that he refuses entirely to be modernized. He is an archaic figure of history who belongs exclusively to his own age and world, to an era that is past and gone. Our communal portrait is a very antique affair whose environment in every respect is more medieval than modern.

Those who sponsor this theory are so obsessed by



the fixed idea of "historical relativity" that they can find no room for Jesus in our modern world, except in some vague mystical sense. They maintain that his conception of life and history was specifically Jewish. It was dispensational, catastrophic, transcendental, and theocratic. The good news of the kingdom he was to usher in related entirely to some arbitrary cosmological visitation of God in history, such as would overthrow evil and establish righteousness upon the earth. That event was in the future, but it was spiritually imminent. In view of this approaching dénouement, Jesus formulated an *interim* ethics to meet the occasion. But the kingdom did not come. His hopes were blasted and the appeal of Jesus is now associated with the pathos of that cross which marked the tragic end of a glorious but forlorn venture. Jesus thus shares the fate of his own age.

The foregoing views reflect, in a general way, the three representative interpretations of the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels. For the first, it is a magical, a deified, a superhuman and non-ethical portrait. For the second, it is a moralistic, a didactic, a scholastic and professorial picture. For the third, it is an antiquarian and a medieval affair of a pre-scientific age. It is indeed true that the milder forms of this latter theory rest the eschatological teachings of Jesus upon an ethical basis and recover for both him and them some permanent value and significance for the religious life. But the out-and-out apocalypticists will have none of this. Even the ethical teachings of Jesus are for them also provisional and ephemeral.

We maintain that neither of the hypotheses referred to grasps the essential character of the

communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels. They are guilty either of identifying the presentational with its permanent realities, or of resolving these realities themselves into vague and formalized ideals relating to human conduct and character. None of the views mentioned goes to the root of the matter, none of them is primary and ultimate. There is an inclusive viewpoint which explains how these other conceptions could have arisen, puts them all in their place, and yields to them their proper meanings. Our present task is to describe the main features of this viewpoint in terms of the distinctive witness and power of the records themselves.

We have already found that the character of the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is composite, and that various elements can be detected therein which combine to produce the full picture. These elements are distinctive and are respectively historical, experiential, and interpretative. The historical came first and is empirically basic, then the experiential, and finally the interpretative. The experiential is, however, fundamental for the explanation of the others, in that it represents the sphere of all personal values and significances.

Our problem may be briefly stated thus: If the Gospel of the sources is centralized in the personality of Jesus, what in him constitutes its basis? What are the abiding features and characteristics of that "spirit" of Jesus, that inner mind and will, which is the very soul of the Gospel and in which the seat of its authority resides? This spirit defines for us our communal portrait, and we shall now proceed to mention four of its fundamental properties which belong to that historical portrait itself.

## II. THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

First of all, the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is ethical, and its living appeal is an embodiment of the moral imperative.

A close study of the records reveals the fact that their common material relates to sayings and doings of Jesus whose character and significance were supremely ethical. It is concerned with ordinary events which reflect normal processes of life and character, rather than with the extraordinary utterances and performances which belong disproportionately to the respective accounts. This common material receives only casual mention and frequently has to be inferred. The Evangelists portray the Jesus of history in an empirical sense only as they stick to the historical structure of his earthly career, and only as they include incidental events which are left to speak for themselves. The real portrayal is implicit, not emphatic; it is a portrayal of life.

It is very probable that the original traditions of the story of Jesus, upon which the four official accounts are more or less based, existed in the documentary form of roughly composed lists of his most impressive words and works. These lists differed in matter of detail, but they agreed in their human and empirical emphases. That is, they regarded and reported the sayings and doings of Jesus not as oracular and superhuman facts, but as daring and audacious facts of faith and freedom. They were viewed as utterances and achievements of Jesus in his human capacity as a man and were conserved in virtue of their own inherent appeal and worth. It was not, indeed, as impersonal and informational facts, as mere sayings and doings, that they were

recorded, but as heroic psychological realities of personal behavior and character. They bear witness to the moral uniqueness of Jesus, to his ethical valor, fearless faith, and devotion to the will of the Father. They represent volitional activities of an adventurous faith.

These ethical properties of the human conduct of Jesus constitute the basic features of our communal portrait and yield to it its immanent and dynamic appeal. For his personality was a reality of cumulative volitional engagements and dedications in history. The events of his career possessed ethical appeal and potency only as events which reflected moral assimilations and achievements of Jesus himself. It may be objected that the ethical can be mediated and vindicated in terms only of some historical system of belief which must be authoritatively accepted. We reply that the ethical is, on the contrary, self-attesting, that it shines in its own light, and that it is the very soul of history itself. Of course, it involves empirical embodiments; but these are all contemporary, contingent, and impermanent. The ethical, as a fact of inner behavior, guarantees the historical, not *vice versa*. In fact, it is the historical.

The communal portrait of the records was, however, as an ethical reality, inevitably incorporated within a context of local beliefs and speculations of faith. It was set in a Jewish frame. If we regard the molds of these contemporary orientations as essential features of this portrait, we shall get one picture of Jesus. If we eliminate their ephemeral properties and concentrate upon their immanent witness, we shall get quite another. Needless to say, we are committed to the second method. We shall,

accordingly, sketch the portrait of Jesus in terms of the communal realities of his personal life and character.

To begin with, we note that the distinctive factors of this portrait are historical. They are not attributes of some preëxistent Jesus whose character was an unfoldment of a static divine nature, and resolved itself thereby into an oracular affair of innate substance. Our portrait is clearly not that of some metaphysical or cosmic deity. It is rather a historical picture of a historical personality that was historically achieved and developed. Its concern as such is not with the whole career of Jesus from the manger to the cross, but only with his adult life and public ministry. The fundamental basis of this portrait is the personal character of Jesus as a volitional reality of *mature* achievement in history. This is formulated in terms of sayings and doings which reflect ethical energies and operations of his inner mind and spirit.

It follows from the foregoing conclusion that our communal portrait is thoroughly human. It involves a living representation of the human Jesus. If it be objected that its essential features are divine, one may retort that such an antithesis is notoriously artificial and deistical. The human and the divine are interwoven and are not mutually exclusive except when magically construed. Indeed, the truly human is the divine, and the truly divine is supremely human. The God who manifests Himself in history through personality must therefore be preëminently human. The divine is thus not the opposite of the human, but is rather its consecration and sublimation in terms of spiritual endeavor and achievement. It is therefore unfolded through the medium of the human,

The words and works of Jesus, upon which his permanent portrait is based, illustrate the volitional activities of a human personality in time and space. They are empirically and psychologically related to the brief period of his public life, apart from which there would never have been any Gospel at all. There is no Gospel of the *infancy* of Jesus that is not wholly apocryphal. For the good news of the kingdom represented achieved certitudes of faith, and it was made public just as soon as Jesus was ready to herald it. It is the good news that was preached and practiced through the medium of his public ministry. Of course, it found its background in his early life and was the progressive fruition thereof. But the revelation of the Gospel was essentially a historical achievement, and was in that respect a cumulative reality of the *adult* life of Jesus.

It is unnecessary, at this late date, to emphasize the fact that the humanity of Jesus was not a mere semblance but a vital reality. This is proved by the uniform witness of the records themselves. They call attention, again and again, to certain mental and physical traits which are distinctively and universally human. For example, it is related of Jesus that he wearied, was grieved, was surprised, was gladdened, was disappointed, was hungry and thirsty. He confessed ignorance of the exact details of the future, expressed amazement at the unbelief of some people, and agonized in prayer to obtain strength for his stupendous task. He knew what self-denial and self-sacrifice meant, and he grew in wisdom and favor with God and man. He wept at Lazarus' grave, he cried in Gethsemane for relief from the bitter cup of the cross, he yielded momentarily on the awful tree itself to the horrible fear

that the Father Himself had forsaken him. He was tempted unto the very end to take the "safe" path, and his temptation was not a flimsy phantasmagoria but a stern reality. What a picture! So thoroughly human, and yet so nobly divine! Again, it is made perfectly clear that he was sustained not by certainties of innate knowledge, but by "certitudes" of achieved faith; not by supernatural reserves and resources, but by communion with God and the sure support of His Holy Spirit.

The early followers of Jesus never considered that he was anything other than truly human. The theory that his humanity was only an appearance, a mere phantom, emerged later within the fold of the early Church, and was forthwith branded as its first heresy. The doctrine of the essential deity of Jesus is only another form of this old Docetic heresy, in that its logical and practical issue is a virtual denial of the human Jesus. Both cannot be true at one and the same time, and no amount of word juggling will make them so. Any attempt, therefore, to harmonize them which is based, for instance, upon some kenotic hypothesis of "self-emptying," can result only in a useless compromise which stands for neither and defends nothing. Deity is a fact of ethical goodness, not of omniscience and omnipotence, and no kenotic process could therefore affect the real situation.

Many will undoubtedly protest against a merely ethical valuation of Jesus. Our reply to such is that there is no such thing as a *merely* ethical. "God is Love," says John (I John iv. 8), and God's love is the root of all things. But the divine love means righteousness, holiness, vicariousness, self-sacrifice, courage, and faith; it is a mode of behavior. The

truly ethical is all this. It is a creative and volitional energy of that moral imperative whose seat is in the holy love of God.

The uniqueness of Jesus is supremely human and ethical, and his portrait in the Gospels reflects a historical reality of unique behavior and character. Its regulative features are personal facts of ethical volitions and selections, of unceasing communion, of brave endurance, of uncompromising obedience, of audacious and intrepid faith. They represent psychological realities of thinking, of feeling, of purposing, which were organized in achieved habits of devotion and issued in certitudes of faith. None but the heroic can grasp the secret of Jesus. He chose deliberately to follow the right, he fought for it, he dared to stand alone, he bore all the consequences, he triumphed with the aid only of those resources which are available for all. He came to grips with the abiding challenge of the moral order of God, and his holy example has forged an ever-living appeal which arraigns conscience and heart and confronts our souls with the mandates of the moral imperative.

Our communal portrait of Jesus is thus fundamentally ethical through and through. Its basic properties are facts of his inner mind and spirit. They represent volitional achievements of behavior and character in history, whose power is human and whose witness is intrinsic and self-attesting. These properties embody psychological habits of life whose challenge is the challenge of courageous practice and faith—the challenge of noble thinking, of noble feeling, of noble decisions and purposes. Intelligence, emotion, and volition are all fully consecrated in Jesus, and they reach in his personal life their very



highest pinnacle of achievement. They become thereby the organs of divine valuations and objectives in history.

The inner character of Jesus was the product of heroic assimilations and adventures of faith. It is therefore imitable and reproducible, and it formulates an ever-living challenge to our moral nature. The ethical, as a fact of moral adjustments, dedications, and triumphs, was the channel through which the spirit of Jesus matured and asserted itself in history. For the ethical is a fact of behavior, and behavior means growth and development. The spirit of Jesus was, accordingly, a volitional reality of personal achievement in time and space and under human and historical conditions. Through the medium of such conditions, this spiritual mind of Jesus forges an undying ethical appeal to conscience and heart which embodies for all time the imperatives of the moral order itself.

We have all this in the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels. It is clothed infallibly by life in the unfading garb of the moral imperative, and we find as we proceed to investigate it that it exercises the power to arrest and arraign our own souls. Its appeal haunts us and confronts us in the guise of an ultimatum. Jesus is, first and foremost, an ethical example.

### III. THE GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

Further, the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is religious, and its ethical power is an activity of the living God.

The witness of Jesus was essentially religious in two respects. First, he never attempted to prove the existence or the goodness of God in any way.

He led men to God; he unveiled and manifested God. He was infinitely more than an interpreter of life and religion; he was a "revealer" of the Father. Second, his knowledge of God was neither innate nor intellectual, but volitional and devotional. It was the fruit of ethical communion, obedience, faith, and sonship. It emerged in the form of religious certitudes which were inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit of God.

Jesus' knowledge and power, as a revealer of the Father, were inherently religious in that they reflected ethical operations and achievements of heroic faith and fellowship. They were products of holy living; of his prayers, of his service of love, of his meditative appropriations of rich religious heritages. Religion is concerned not so much with thoughts of God as with the "power" of God in human life and experience. Its objective is fellowship with the Father, and the truly religious man mediates thereby an activity of the living God in history which is self-illuminating and self-attesting. The uniqueness of Jesus, as an empirical fact of ethical behavior and character, issued inevitably in a vision and an operation of God which brought men through Jesus into direct contact with the power of God Himself. His communal portrait in the Gospels is characterized by the God-consciousness, and by this not merely as a fact of observation but also as a dynamic reality of the very presence and power of the immanent and transcendent God. It is an activity of the ever-living God that confronts us; it is a divine energy which touches our hearts and seeks to renew our souls unto righteousness.

The inner appeal and power of this portrait are therefore not merely ethical in the accepted sense,

They are more than ethical in that they do not leave us under condemnation and in utter despair of ourselves. They represent personal and redemptive energies of grace which embody and release recuperative and recreative forces of repentance and faith, of forgiveness and reconciliation, of trust and confidence in God. They confront our souls not with mere bloodless mandates and proclamations, but with dynamic expressions and operations of divine grace that fructify in actual stimulations and modifications of conduct and character. Forgiveness is something more than a bald judicial manifesto; it represents a reconstructive activity of the redemptive God Himself in responsive and obedient hearts.

Religion is a fellowship of faith, hope, and love. It involves an experience of divine grace which begets and sustains spiritual life. Love is its center and soul. But *God* is love, and His fellowship is "the power of an endless life." Now it is precisely the *love* of Jesus that constitutes the very soul of his communal portrait in the Gospels. This love is vibrant in his compassion, his tender mercy, his purity, his forgiving spirit, his communion, his courage of faith, his holy devotion, his pleadings and warnings, his vicarious sacrifices and sufferings. All these and other features of the personal witness of Jesus, however, represented achieved habits of thought and practice that were the fruits of fellowship with the Father. These habits, in turn, issued in those visions and convictions of faith which are implicit in any real experience of sonship. They established an utter confidence in God through which the unfoldment of his presence and power was mediated in history. The perfect sonship of Jesus rendered all these operations complete, and the love

of the Father is thus fully expressed in the historic love of Jesus. His holy life and testimony are graphic examples of religious assurance and consecration.

But these latter are very much more than this. They are redemptive energies and powers which reproduce their fruits in us as we put ourselves under the influence of the spirit of Jesus. His personality is a religious force in that he actually begets in our souls experiences of faith and love, of penitence and forgiveness, of reconciliation and confidence in God. The spiritual example of Jesus is an energy of life, an activity of the living God Himself, that is dynamically operative in the uprooting of evil habits and in the formation of Christian character. It provides us with a recreative environment of grace which makes for newness of life, and which mediates for us an experience of the living God in the fellowship of life eternal.

Christian experience itself bears witness to the fact that Jesus does bring God to us and us to God. Indeed, it does far more than this; it makes it clear that it is God Himself who speaks to us and deals with our souls in Jesus. We investigate his appeal and find that it is the appeal of God. We put ourselves under his power and discover that it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16). Jesus moves us to penitence and faith, he ministers forgiveness, he begets the new creation, he bestows upon us the blessings of life and peace. And in all such experiences we realize that the work of Jesus is actually the work of God, and that his voice is the voice of the Father who is thus drawing us unto Himself.

All revelations of God in history reached their climax in the revelation that was mediated through

the spiritual personality of Jesus. What can we, and what do we, know of God apart from Jesus' disclosure of the Father? Very little, indeed. What we actually can and do know is usually of an elementary and unsatisfactory character. It is only in Jesus, in his inner mind and spirit, that the presence and power of God are fully unfolded and are fully operative for our salvation. And it is not religious ideas that he communicates to us when we respond to his appeal. He brings to us, rather, redemptive agencies and energies of faith, hope, and love. He leads us to the Father and is thereby the author of our salvation. We owe all to his grace and goodness. Eternal life is his gift, and the confession of his deity is but an acknowledgment of this fact. Its content is essentially devotional and experiential, not intellectual and metaphysical. We call Jesus divine, the only-begotten Son of the Father, because his unique work of grace in us is the divine work of the Father Himself. We ascribe to Jesus the titles of Redeemer and Lord; for he is actually the Redeemer and Lord of our souls.

But, it may be objected, does not this close relationship of Jesus with the Father postulate some innate and hypostatic unity with God that qualified him for his redemptive task? We reply that the precise character of such a relationship, even though it actually existed, must ever remain an unfathomable secret of the self-consciousness of Jesus. This secret was not, and could not be, communicated to men in terms of human language. But what is this metaphysical "thing-in-itself," this preëxistent substance, which renders the work of Jesus automatic and robs it thereby of all volitional properties and ethical potencies?

The deity of Jesus is a self-attesting fact whose nature is self-unfolded in terms only of its ethical and religious significances and sequences in experiences of faith. It is a spiritual reality of faith and fellowship. There was nothing in the external appearance of Jesus, and nothing in his psychological make-up, to distinguish him from other men. His uniqueness was clearly human and historical, and was an achieved product of ethical valor and of religious faith. It was spiritually constituted and developed, and it is as a volitional energy of personal character that it forges its appeal and releases its power in history. The deity of Jesus is therefore a historical reality of redemptive quickenings and transformations. It is in this respect that his communal portrait is essentially religious. Its fundamental properties are creative energies of faith and love, redemptive activities of God Himself in history.

Even a superficial survey of the Gospel narratives will make it clear that the historical Jesus was imbued with a unique sense of divine possession and vocation. This was the normal fruit of his unique sonship, of his unique volitional and ethical fellowship with the Father. Jesus identified himself with the life of God to such an extent that he was wholly possessed by the Spirit of God. He made the Father's interests so completely his concern that the sense of God permeates his whole outlook. The communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels reflects this God-consciousness as a reality of personal witness, and also as an energy of redemption that represents an actual functioning of the living God in human life.

The Christology of the New Testament is based

not upon metaphysical premises, but upon the religious significances of Jesus in experiences of faith. When we turn to him with sincere purpose, we actually find that we are face to face with God in the realm of the spirit. He unveils God, he mediates God, he leads us to God. Jesus is, then, Redeemer and Lord.

#### IV. THE DIVINE ORDER

Again, the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is spiritual, and its religious witness is an unfolding of the divine order.

The divine order is that immanent and transcendent realm of the Infinite Spirit in which the human spirit lives, and moves, and has its being. It is creatively operative in history, but it transcends all history as an encompassing reality of the ever-living present. It is to this that we are ultimately related in our inmost souls. It is the "spiritual" appeal that is fundamental for life and experience themselves. All our relationships with God and man are inherently spiritual. Religion is therefore not an affair of beliefs and dogmas, but of spiritual visions and assurances. It is a reality of the spirit, and it is the witness of the spirit that is the permanent arbiter in all Christian character and discipleship.

This was especially true in the matter of the religious witness of the historic Jesus. It was the impact of his inner spirit that inspired his disciples to leave all and to follow him. It was his spirit that won them, sustained and redeemed them, caused them to cleave to him, held them loyal to his cause in the very face of death. It was a fellowship of spirit that the disciples enjoyed in the company of Jesus, and a story of spiritual blessings that

gathered around his name. Jesus spoke to the heart, to the spirit, and he renewed the souls of men.

The ultimateness of spirit implies an ultimate spiritual order of life whose creative soul is the Eternal Spirit. Jesus identified this order with the kingdom of God, and he spoke of it in terms thereof. We have already seen that the kingdom is a spiritual and social fact, that it is ethical and redemptive, that it is inclusive and ever present, and that it is dynamically embodied and unfolded in the historic personality of Jesus. Undoubtedly the early disciples subjected the idea of the kingdom of God to their own local and national interpretations. But this fact does not invalidate the hypothesis that the conception was for Jesus primarily and ultimately spiritual, and that the kingdom was therefore but another name for the divine order itself. This order involves the personal rule of the holy God in human hearts as the Father of all grace and goodness. It is redemptively manifested in history in terms of recuperative and regenerative agencies and energies of personality and life. Its approach to us is essentially personal and spiritual.

Granting that the divine order, as a personal and spiritual reality, is a fact of spirit that is revealed to spirit and only in terms of spirit, we can understand in some degree its relation to the religious witness of Jesus. Jesus made this order his own so completely that he became its living voice in history. All its properties are focused and organized in his personal life, so that the divine order now functions in history in terms of the living spirit of Jesus. This spirit pervades and animates his communal portrait in the Gospels. It reflects and unfolds the invisible kingdom of the Eternal Spirit.



Such was the religious witness of Jesus. He introduced his followers not to any merely apocalyptic kingdom, but to the divine order itself. Proof of this is found in the fact that they sought, after his departure, to emulate his devotional example and to live by his spirit. The early Church managed to exist for nearly forty years without any official documents relating to the story of Jesus. What did it live by meanwhile, and in what was the message of Jesus conserved? Did it not live by the spirit of Jesus, and was not its evangel treasured in the religious faith and fellowship of believing hearts? It is only a spiritual Gospel that can adequately account for the origin and continued existence of the Christian Church. The early disciples owed their faith and hope, even from the very beginning, to the silent and unconscious impacts of the spiritual mind and will of Jesus. It was the inner witness of his spirit in their hearts, which was the fruit of fellowship with Jesus in the flesh, that rescued their souls from utter despair after the crucifixion, and convinced them that he was "alive forevermore."

The Church came into being through the Spirit of Jesus. The founding of it represented a dynamic attempt to express the divine order in terms of the faith and fellowship of the Christian community. It lived thereafter by the inner rule and power of that spirit, in terms of which the redemptive work of Jesus was continued in human hearts. During the period when oral traditions held sway, the Church was preëminently a Church of the spirit that lived by the spirit and was sustained thereby. The story of Jesus was originally formulated not in historical documents, but in spiritual experiences of faith. It was a story wrought out and enshrined

in the hearts of those who loved him and left all to follow him. That was an era of the Spirit.

Many factors contributed toward the compilation of the Gospel narratives. The rule of the spirit was a doctrine that was open to grave abuse and lent itself to all sorts of spiritual and emotional extravagances. For one thing, both teaching and practice lacked objective criteria. The historical events and contexts of Jesus' earthly career were in danger of being forgotten, or of being allegorized, or of being repudiated altogether. Fancy dethroned fact, apocryphal idealizations ran wild, Oriental and magical speculations threatened to supplant the sober simplicities of the Gospel. The historical substratum survived in the form only of garbled and unauthenticated traditions. The need arose, therefore, within the Church itself for official records relating to the historical bases of the life and ministry of Jesus, and to those concrete limitations and unfoldments which were objectively regulative for any valid interpretation of the spirit of Jesus. This spirit did not materialize in the atmosphere. It emerged, rather, in history, and its self-revelation was wrought out within a specific environment of local needs and tasks and situations.

The original vitality of faith began, with the passing of time, to show signs of exhaustion and petrification, so that the problem of its renewal became synonymous with that of establishing afresh its inherent relation to the historical career of Jesus. Frequent returns to the Jesus of history are, in this sense, always necessary; and, in the first century, such a return was made possible only through the compilation of our official Gospels. The events themselves, however, could be neither reproduced

nor transmitted; they could be conserved only in the form of personal accounts and presentations. This implies that the significance of the external story of Jesus is inward and spiritual, that it bears witness to an inner reservoir of spiritual power and grace, and that all this is mediated for us only through the external framework of the Gospel.

The evangelical records claim to be independent and versatile accounts not of mere empirical occurrences, but of that creative spirit which gave birth to both. Their revelation is concerned with that immanent spirit of Jesus which is the essence of his personal character, and is thereby the very soul of the Gospel itself. The original Gospel was alive only as a vitalizing reality of the spirit of Jesus. It survives in the records only as they embody a communal revelation of his spiritual character in terms of its redemptive potencies and accomplishments.

Jesus himself left no certified documents of any kind to guide us in the interpretation of his message. It was never his intention to write it down in a book or to embalm it in standardized accounts which were divinely endowed with oracular properties. His was a "living word" to which no book could ever do justice, and in whose pages its creative spirit could never be imprisoned. It was a word that could be best heralded and preached, that could be unfolded only through the living voice, that could be fully illustrated only through the medium of human emotions and confessions. However, Jesus did leave documents of a kind behind him, *human* documents through whose personal history alone his own spirit could be dynamically conserved and communicated to men. He wrote out his immortal message in the souls of his first disciples. He

inscribed his story indelibly upon the hearts of those who responded to his appeal and power.

There is a profound sense in which the communal witness of the Gospels is elaborated and perfected in the Epistles, and more especially in Paul's doctrine of the life of the Spirit. One may seriously question whether any follower of Jesus ever lived so close to the Master, was so thoroughly possessed by his spirit, and grasped so lucidly and comprehensively his immortal secret and significance as the Apostle Paul. There is no conflict between Jesus and Paul, and the theory that the apostle misrepresented Jesus is both superficial and preposterous. Paul was his most acute interpreter, and he understood most fully the inner and permanent values of Jesus' mind and spirit. For Paul appraised Jesus and his Gospel in terms of that unforgettable spiritual experience of Jesus on the road to Damascus. He knew Jesus not "after the flesh" but "after the spirit," and his gospel is a gospel of that "spirit of life in Christ Jesus" which makes us "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. viii. 2).

The communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is explicated and developed for us in this doctrine of the Spirit. This teaching reflected the Gospel that was preached and practiced before the records came into existence. The historic Jesus yielded his secret only in the fellowship of the indwelling Christ. It is thus the spirit of Jesus, as a permanent reality of that all-encompassing spiritual order to which we all belong, that is central and fundamental in our communal Gospel. No other witness could possibly be conserved in fragmentary documents and diversified presentations. This order is a realm of grace where the redemptive God meets with our souls through

the spirit of Jesus, and bestows upon us the blessings of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Historicists are so obsessed by the evolutionary idea of "relative processes" that they will allow neither to Jesus nor to his first disciples any spiritual thoughts and experiences. Both are nonchalantly submerged in their own world and are made the victims of conventional ideas and thought-worlds whose relevance was specifically local and transitional. And yet, historicists claim spiritual thoughts and emphases for themselves and enforce these as regulative standards of appraisal. But, seeing that the divine order is an ever-present reality for faith, seeing that all spiritual experiences represent a direct contact therewith and response thereto, seeing that spiritual vision and fellowship with God are equally accessible to all in every age, why should Jesus and his followers necessarily be our inferiors in this respect? Surely, no one would suggest that spiritual life is a mechanical affair of chronology! Jesus and his disciples were certainly our superiors in the matter of ethical and religious devotion, and were thereby better qualified to mediate a revelation of the divine order in history.

It is clear that Jesus spoke directly to the human spirit and that his religious witness represented an unfoldment of that divine order which is ever redemptively active for our salvation. His God was an ever-present reality of faith and fellowship. His message was the good news of the Father's love and care, of the forgiveness of sins, of the glory of sonship, of the victory of faith, of eternal life in the midst of time. Jesus was and is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy of recreation and reconciliation. It is the invisible spiritual order of life that deals with

us in him, and it was through his personal mind and spirit that it became fully operative in history as a reality of redeeming agencies and potencies.

The communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is an embodiment of the religious appeal and power of the divine order, through which the God of all grace makes his advances to our souls. It is essentially a spiritual portrait. Its fundamental witness is that of the spiritual God who was manifested in Jesus in all His ethical and religious fullness, and who is thus dynamically active in history as an immanent and ever-present reality of the divine order of life. Jesus is the Word of God, God "manifest in the flesh."

#### V. THE LIVING SPIRIT

Finally, the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is dynamic, and its recreative vitality is the reflection of a living spirit.

The proof that this portrait of Jesus is precisely the portrait of his inner character, his inner mind and spirit, is implicit in the common purpose of the Evangelists as this is disclosed in what they actually achieved. The records present us not with a mere repository of bare historical events which may be conveniently converted into an arsenal of proof-texts, nor with a theological or philosophical catalogue of ethical and religious ideas. Rather do they show graphic snapshots of the living spirit of Jesus in action.

Jesus is alive in the Gospels, and they are just so many dead documents without him. It is he himself, his living spirit, whom we meet in their pages, lighting up and galvanizing the facts about himself and publishing through them his distinc-

tive challenge to our spiritual nature. This is also true of the remaining portions of the New Testament. They represent Christian portrayals of facts in terms of the spiritual vitality of the personal life of Jesus. It is he himself who lives in all the traditions and accounts inspired by his heroic example and testimony. It is he alone who invests them with whatever potencies they possess.

All the properties of a "living spirit" are essentially dynamic. However, its vitality expresses itself in personality and history not in any literal and mechanical fashion, but creatively, autonomously, transformatively, and exploratively. This applies to the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels as a dynamic reality of his inner spirit, and the ever-living spirit of Jesus is revealed and unfolded therein in this fourfold manner.

First of all, the communal portrait of Jesus is dynamic in the sense that it reflects *creatively* the living spirit of Jesus through the medium of personal history.

This portrait is obviously based upon an empirical groundwork of events which were creative fruits of the personal volitions of Jesus. It is set within a concrete framework of historical and psychological habits and activities which expressed the direct operations of his living spirit. The communal portrait is not a formal and nebulous affair of impersonal ideas, emotions, and influences. It embodies, rather, a psychological reality of spiritual behavior and character which is incorporated within an external system of historical events. These events reflect the dynamic functionings of that creative mind and will of Jesus which gave them both birth and meaning. They are in fact living expressions

and formulations of his inner life in terms of local needs and tasks and situations. The authority and challenge of Jesus are thus ethical and volitional, and the fundamentals of the Gospel are concerned with this spiritual witness of his personal history.

The historical events of Jesus' career were empirical creations and reflections of his personal life. Their testimony was organically related thereto and their vitality found its source therein. Our communal portrait is, accordingly, not a rigid and lifeless affair of statistical and statutory facts of history, upon whose foundation one may raise a dogmatic structure of immutable beliefs. It is, rather, a vitalizing reality of self-operating and self-revealing volitions and purposes. Its inherent properties are dynamic energies of spiritual behavior which are alive in all their overt embodiments, and through which the historic Jesus ever touches the hearts of men with his haunting and immortal appeal.

It is this personal will, this spiritual character, of Jesus that is immanently alive in all the empirical events of the records. It is this that strikes home to heart and conscience with all the force and authority of the moral imperative. All its facts are life-giving and life-enriching energies of spirit which can be only spiritually discerned and appropriated. Their significance will never yield its secret to any merely impersonal approach of dogmatic theology or of historical criticism. It must ever remain in its fullness the peculiar treasure of those who have received the spirit of Jesus and who love his name. This spirit brought the events into being, and it alone converts the accounts of them into living and abiding traditions of history whose



import is spiritually unfolded in personal experiences of faith.

We have already observed that the original story of Jesus was not written in books nor embalmed in any official events and traditions. It was a dynamic reality of his inner life, and was inscribed by his spirit upon the hearts of those who received him. The documents came long after as inspired products of spiritual experiences that were based upon living contacts with the very soul of Jesus. The traditions followed inevitably, but their testimony was at best only second-hand: they involved a second remove from the original facts of the personal history of Jesus which constituted their communal basis.

Second, the communal portrait of Jesus is dynamic in the sense that it reflects *autonomously* the living spirit of Jesus through the medium of local interpretations.

The external history of Jesus disclosed its inner character in terms only of autonomous experiences of Jesus. These are what produced the accounts in the first instance, and such experiences alone can interpret them to mind and heart as local and versatile fruits of spiritual insights and appropriations. The portrait of Jesus is reflected in the records not impersonally and oracularly, but through the psychological representations of his reporters. It is framed in terms of local interests, beliefs, and interpretations. But it is dynamic in the sense that it emerges in the accounts in the form of individual and versatile presentations that were contemporarily alive, and were based upon personal experiences and assimilations of the renewing spirit of Jesus. This portrait is formulated, therefore, in the language of local categories and thought-worlds. It emerges

as an immanent reality of personal and autonomous perceptions and testimonies of faith.

A living gospel can release its vitality in every age only through the channels of relevant needs and outlooks, and only through incorporations whose precise form is both individual and impermanent. To become a gospel for the day, in any dynamic sense, it must submit to appropriations and presentations that reflect vital interests of contemporary thought and practice.

Such a gospel, however, must be essentially a gospel of the "spirit" before it could thus adapt itself to varying conditions and situations. It is precisely in this respect that the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels is dynamic and is the portrait of his living spirit. It is compositely sketched and conserved in the accounts in terms of local estimates and presentations of the witness of Jesus. But the fact that these were actually local, and therefore personal and indigenous, illustrates their vital character as dynamic and contemporary unfoldments of his living spirit. In that capacity they clearly establish for us a witness of life which is inclusive and abiding.

Third, the communal portrait of Jesus is dynamic in the sense that it reflects *transformatively* the living spirit of Jesus through the medium of saving experiences.

The records reflect experiences of faith which were redemptive products of the personal grace of Jesus. Such experiences constituted the living background and inspiration of the accounts themselves. Behind and in all the local presentations in their composite character, we can feel the impacts of those saving experiences which were induced by the spirit of

Jesus, and through which the potencies and significances of his living spirit were being unfolded in terms of the redemptive changes it precipitated in personal life. The traditions and accounts followed such experiences, and it is extremely important to observe that they did actually emerge in that order. This fact implies not only that they were originally secondary and presentational, but also that the experiences which inspired them were so vivid and vital as to invite communal publication by word of mouth and through the medium of documents. It indicates also that the facts of Jesus were mobile, adaptable, convertible, and galvanic realities which could be both spiritually appropriated and versatily proclaimed.

It is well to remember this latter feature of the Gospel message. Reputed facts whose nature is so obviously static and speculative that they can be neither inherently preached nor devotionally assimilated are in no sense fundamental for the Gospel. While, therefore, our approach to Jesus is necessarily mediated through a system of historical events and traditions, the fact is clear that all these were essentially derivative and presentational. Their vitality was a dynamic property of that personal grace of Jesus which was creatively alive in both and was originally unfolded only through the medium of redemptive experiences of faith. These experiences animate the accounts. They forge a dynamic witness that unveils the living spirit of Jesus in terms of its transformative effects and sequences.

Fourth, the communal portrait of Jesus is dynamic in the sense that it reflects *exploratively* the living spirit of Jesus through the medium of heroic dedications.

The spirit of Jesus possesses significance not only for human life, but also for the whole universe. It is defined, therefore, not only through its saving achievements in personal life, but also through those revelations of life itself that are the fruits of its heroic explorations and dedications. Our communal portrait is dynamic in this fuller sense as well, in that it focuses the creative potencies and mandates of that larger environment of life which is incorporated and assimilatively reflected in habits of personal devotion and of explorative faith. Jesus' communion with God, his consecrated response to life and the universe, were so complete and whole-hearted that the vitalizing resources of both life and God are mediated through the appeal and power of his spiritual character. He so identified himself with the divine order through courageous adventures and assimilations of faith that it found in him both its voice and its dynamic vehicle in history.

This brave and thoroughgoing adjustment of Jesus to his total environment resulted in explorative revelations of the whole universe which now function in history in terms of his living spirit. Jesus is thus the organ and the revealer of both life and God, and their abiding witness and power are focused in that native appeal which emanates from his spiritual personality. His Gospel is the Gospel of life, his message is eternal life, and he is the life. His spirit, as an explorative and assimilative gift and achievement of heroic faith, has now become the dynamic medium through which life and God express themselves in history. It stands for both. It unfolds the redemptive properties and potencies of life. It embodies the living Word of God.

The communal portrait of Jesus represents, therefore, through its historical events, its local presenta-

tions, its experiences of faith, its devotional explorations, a permanent and dynamic operation of the immanent God in human life and history. It reflects the action of a living spirit which arrests and arraigns our moral nature, and we recognize this as none other than the Spirit of the living God Himself.

Ultimately, then, we have in the Gospels, back of all other features, the personal and dynamic witness of that living spirit of Jesus which constitutes their very soul and articulates the full and final revelation of the redemptive God in history. Their vitality is thus a reality of that invisible and encompassing divine order to which they bear communal witness, and which belongs neither to the past nor to the future but to the ever-living present. This is the sphere of immortality, the realm of that "spirit of life in Christ Jesus" whose cosmic source is the creative life of the Eternal Spirit. It is God and life that speak to our souls through the spirit of Jesus and are permanently operative therein for our salvation. He is the mediator of eternal life.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WITNESS OF CHARACTER

#### I. THE UNIQUE LIFE

The evangelical portrayals of the historical Jesus bear testimony to a unique personality. They credit him unanimously with a unique life which has left an indelible mark upon the centuries and has inspired men of all races to emulate his spirit and to follow his example.

Unless we are prepared to believe that ethical and religious ideals emerge entirely in the void, we must assume that the communal portrait of Jesus in the Gospels was taken from life, and that it reflects life's inherent estimate of his spiritual personality. It is life itself that has isolated him in history, has placed him beyond all classification, and has given him "a name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9). It testifies to the twofold uniqueness of Jesus; to his unique behavior, and to his unique significances for personal life. These aspects of the subject can be logically distinguished, but they belong organically together and can never be wholly dissociated.

Reference has already been made to life's evaluation of Jesus in terms of his significances for faith. These are unfolded in two ways: first, through the modifications of thought and practice which he inspires and sustains; second, through those convic-

tions of faith which identify his recreative appeals and potencies with the immutable mandates and constraints of the divine order. All these estimates are historical in the sense that they emerge as perceptual fruits of faith and fellowship. History demonstrates, then, the uniqueness of Jesus even in this respect. It bases it upon his personal behavior and character and defines it in terms of that complete volitional identification of Jesus with God which expressed itself in perfect sonship. He became thereby the interpreter, the revealer, the redemptive organ, of the divine order in history. For this order is the personal kingdom of the ever-living and ever-present God; and, as personal, it functions fully in history only through the versatile and autonomous medium of personality.

Given a personality that lives unreservedly within the divine order in holy and heroic fellowship with God, it follows that this will automatically become the dynamic vehicle of all its spiritual imperatives and redemptive bestowals. The self-operations of this order will thereafter assert themselves as facts and forces of spiritual character whose significance is unfolded in terms only of their creative and transformative sequences in personal life.

We have seen that the good news of the kingdom relates to a gracious activity of the living God in Jesus which induces repentance and leads to life eternal. It is the good news of a unique Savior. The voice of Jesus is thus the voice of God, and it is God who meets us in Jesus. When we deal seriously with his challenge, we awaken to the fact that it is the power of God Himself which is wrestling with us for our salvation. The new and unique thing in the Gospel is Jesus himself. *He* is the good news.

*He* is the kingdom. *He* is the fullness of God in life and history as a redemptive reality of grace. God was present in the spiritual behavior of Jesus as an ethical and a regenerative energy of life which induced penitence of soul, stimulated faith, assured forgiveness, uprooted evil habits, and wrought out an eternal salvation.

All these larger aspects and significances of the personal life of Jesus must be impartially considered if we are to do full justice to the subject of his uniqueness. Our present concern, however, is with the unique life of Jesus as a fact of personal character.

We possess unusual facilities for the study of the unique personality of Jesus in terms of his personal behavior and character. We have already noted the fact that the evangelical records are "living" traditions and that the portrait of Jesus is concretely and dynamically alive in their pages. They provide us with pictorial and dramatic sketches of that very soul of Jesus which animates them and lives again in the devotion that produced them. The Evangelists were wonderfully successful in conserving the living touch of Jesus, in galvanizing his words and works with the vital spark of his living spirit, so that the traditions confront us with graphic and dramatic appeals to the imagination in which mind and heart are arrested and arraigned. They preserve his moods, gestures, personal traits; the flash of his eyes, the sorrowful mien, the heroic set of his countenance, his weariness of body, his vigils of prayer, his amazing compassion, his healing activities, his joy and peace, his triumph over the world, and his serene confidence in God in spite of the very worst.



Through these living pictures, the inner mind and spirit of Jesus are disclosed to us in the guise of gracious and renewing energies and operations of spiritual character. They are creative organs and instruments of truth, holiness, heroism, faith, love, and devotion to the will of God. These are the fundamental and challenging realities of the records, and these forge their specific witness and appeal. The accounts teem with dramatic portrayals of spiritual habits of life, so that Jesus himself stands again before our minds and hearts in all his pristine glory. Their concrete contexts and situations can all be reconstructed with the aid of a sympathetic imagination, and until they are so reconstructed Jesus must ever remain to our world an unparalleled enigma.

Jesus himself, as a vitalizing personality, is central for the significance and comprehension of the evangelical accounts. He illuminates all their situations through the agency of his living spirit. The spiritual vitality of the Gospels, and of the Gospel itself, is a dynamic reality of the spiritual character of Jesus. It is a permanent potency of that "spirit of life in Christ Jesus" which belongs to the ever-living present. The secret of the unique life of Jesus resides, accordingly, in the uniqueness of his spiritual character. We are concerned in this chapter with the self-revelation of that unique character. This, we maintain, is unfolded in the records not in terms of isolated texts or messianic phrases and expressions, but in terms of spiritual volitions and dedications.

No investigation of the historical and religious content of such expressions as the "Son of Man," the "Christ," the "Son of God," the "Messiah," and

so forth can wrest from Jesus the secret of his inner life. That is self-revealed only through the medium of its psychological habits of behavior, its own self-affirmations, and its recreative products in experiences of faith and fellowship. We shall consider the unique witness of the inner life of Jesus as it is unfolded through these respective channels.

## II. THE DEVOTIONAL BACKGROUND

We note, first, that the spiritual character of Jesus is ethically self-revealed as a volitional activity of devotional life.

Why, it has been asked, was the Savior of men born in far-off Palestine? What was there in the history and environment of this insignificant Roman protectorate which prepared for his coming and provided material for his development? Why did Jesus belong to that most despised and obscure of all peoples, the Jews? The general answer is that the Jews possessed unique religious traditions and heritages which distinguished them from all other races and peoples upon the earth.

This is undoubtedly the truest answer to the question. The Jews had cultivated an instinct for God and righteousness which was unique and ethically conditioned. Their history was the story of how they had been progressively led and enlightened by His divine Spirit. The traditions associated therewith were historically and sociologically embodied in certain sacred writings, festivals and institutions, whose character was uniquely religious. Succeeding generations of Jews inherited a genius for religion, and this fact served to mark them out as "a peculiar people of God" in whom the God-consciousness was supremely alive and dominant. Their moral life

was steeped in religion and rooted in a religious view and valuation of things. This was the atmosphere they breathed, the environment in which they moved and had their being. It was not so much pre-scientific as *ultra*-scientific. It represented their contribution toward the enrichment of life and the progress of civilization. Other nations had produced warriors and artificers, but theirs had begotten seers and saints of God. Other peoples had bequeathed to the world works of art and philosophy, but their fathers had blessed it with the richer heritage of the Law and the Prophets.

Moreover, this particular revelation of God was ethically based and mediated, as is evidenced more especially by the prophetic writings. It was the fruit of that ethical receptivity, responsiveness, obedience, and fellowship which culminated in religious insights and certitudes of faith. It represented a human and progressive achievement of moral consecration, through which God made Himself known to those who trusted in Him and coöperated with His holy purpose. Ethical defection corrupted this inheritance in the course of time, but it was still there for those who had courage to unearth it and faith to make it their own. It was hidden only from the unbelieving.

In short, then, Jesus emerged in history as Savior and Lord within a Jewish environment precisely because the Jews possessed a unique *Bible*. This was the inspiration of all those religious hopes, beliefs, customs, and institutions in which its ideals and teachings were embodied. It was a democratic Bible, the Bible of every family hearth and village synagogue. Every Jewish child came under its holy influence, was instructed in its historical teachings

and backgrounds from earliest infancy, and assimilated its rich ideals through both precept and example. At about twelve years of age, the boys were taken by their parents to the Temple at Jerusalem for the observance of one of the annual feasts. They were, on that occasion, required to submit to a religious examination at the hands of the official exponents of the Law. This qualified them to become "sons of the Law."

Of course, some process of degeneration was always at work, and this would be characterized by a growing neglect of prophetic ideals and writings. There is ground for believing that this process had reached a chronic stage in the days of Jesus, so that the Prophets had come to be regarded solely as adjuncts of the Law. They were merely reëmphases and re-unfoldments of its original message. They recovered the Law, they restored obedience thereto, they reënforced its primary obligations. The prophetic writings did not represent progressive developments and enrichments of the Law, which they actually involved. The inevitable result was that they were wholly subordinated to the Law and were then entirely ignored and neglected. Jewish religion thus deteriorated into a legal affair of rules and regulations, of rites and ceremonies, of external observations and allegiances.

Such was the religious environment in which Jesus was born and nurtured. It provided facilities for the emergence of the God-consciousness and the messianic vocation. The latter was going a-begging, for no one was ready to pay the price and to fulfill the conditions. Jesus breathed this atmosphere of piety, grew up in it, and became in due time a "son of the Law." His intellectual and religious progress

was wholly normal, and it was a volitional fact of human assimilations and reactions which fructified in ethical insights and certitudes of faith. The popular notion that Jesus reversed the rôles of scholar and teacher upon the occasion of his first visit to the Temple, and that he was found there confuting and instructing his examiners, is entirely unscriptural. The account in Luke tells us only that Jesus listened to them and asked them questions, and that all who "heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke ii. 46, 47). There is no ground whatsoever for believing that Jesus was a religious prodigy. All that the incident proves is that he was unusually studious, and that his grasp of the Scriptures was unique for one of his age.

Luke yields us the clue, in the incident referred to, to the progressive uniqueness of Jesus as a reality of ethical and devotional habits of life. When his parents took him to task for his apparent lack of filial consideration, Jesus is reported to have said in reply: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business" (Luke ii. 49). Jesus had, at this early and most impressionable age, caught the spirit of the Prophets. He was ethically and religiously serious; he put God first; he grasped the true significance of life as a divine vocation. This development, it is true, was provided for in his religious inheritance. It involved, none the less, a courageous and devotional appropriation thereof which was based upon daily habits of faith and communion with God.

The formation of character is a volitional process which resolves itself into the formation of ethical habits of thinking, of feeling, and of purposing. It

is governed by heroic environmental responses and appropriations, by free religious evaluations of an adventurous faith. For the living God is the ultimate environment of the human spirit and "moral obedience" becomes thus the organ of all spiritual insight and character. It follows therefrom that the spiritual character of Jesus was, like all character, a growth from *small beginnings* and was rooted in the volitional and devotional habits of his early life. His tender years revealed a certain strength and originality of character which were undoubtedly the fruits of an independence of thought that was nourished by prophetic visions of the divine order. These were, in turn, based upon growing habits of faith and fellowship which were established through unceasing absorptions of the divine heritages of Israel. Jesus honored these divine ordinances, and they became the accredited instruments through which his progressive uniqueness was unfolded and sustained.

Religion never thrives in an atmosphere of nebulous contexts. The devotional life has its specific channels, and it is important, therefore, to note the means through which Jesus sought to nourish his spiritual life and to increase his confidence in God. Three only need be mentioned: the Scriptures, prayer, and the Church.

Jesus inherited the *sacred writings*, and he made good use of them. The evidence proves that he was always a close student of the Scriptures, that he showed a marked preference for the prophetic writings, and that he sought thus to achieve and perfect a faith through the medium of religious devotion. Jesus absorbed his divine inheritance from the past: he appropriated the whole of it. His

frequent quotations from the Scriptures in hours of crisis, of loneliness and distress, disclose the extent to which he nourished his courage and faith on the sacred writings. In view of the legal conception of religion which prevailed in his day, this life of faith would have been utterly impossible apart from the psychological formation of daily devotional habits of reading and reflection, of ethical obedience and fellowship, which were based upon volitional effort and consecration. The practice of the real presence of God was no easier for Jesus than for others. It was hard for all in an age when religion itself had degenerated into a soulless thing of rites and ceremonies.

The secret of the unique spiritual character of Jesus resides not in some static divine nature, but in his devotional life. This was a life of faith, of fellowship, of courage, of consecration, of utter dependence upon the guidance and support of the Holy Spirit of God. Others read, reflected, and obeyed, but Jesus did all three more intensely and to greater advantage. Such habits of pious thinking, feeling, and purposing demanded for their formation the exercise of constant watchfulness, of persistent self-denial, of heroic efforts and decisions. To live only by that revelation of God which came to his own soul through volitional appropriations and developments of prophetic ideals and teachings required a faith which none but the Spirit of God Himself could inspire and sustain.

Given a religious environment such as Jesus inherited, of hopes, beliefs, ideals, teachings, customs, institutions, sacred writings, revelations, historical triumphs, outstanding pioneers and personalities, the rest is a foregone conclusion. The challenge of

life to Jesus will inevitably require a volitional appropriation of this heritage in all its fullness. His ministry will formulate its task in terms of the messianic hope and vocation. His message will represent a spiritual unfoldment and development of the fundamental realities which are embodied in "the law and the prophets" (Matt. v. 17).

Such an environment was not a static and tangible affair of conventional ideals, influences, and contacts. It was not identical with the empirical and contemporary surroundings of Jesus, but was rather an invisible reality of spiritual meanings and potencies that existed only for faith. Consequently, this inheritance was not materially and automatically "causative," as is sometimes inferred. It had to be volitionally appropriated through heroic adjustments and experimentations, within whose receptive and responsive atmosphere it emerged as a fact of religious resources and certitudes. The uniqueness of Jesus was rooted in his personal relation to this intangible heritage of Israel. His character was not a product of his local surroundings, and it cannot be sociologically accounted for in any deterministic fashion. For why, in that case, was he so different from all others? All alike shared the same external conditions and historic assets.

Indeed, it was precisely this *difference* that was so remarkable in Jesus. Wherein did it consist? What distinguished him, in larger or lesser degree, from all his compatriots? Was it not the heroic acceptance of a divine heritage which *they* refused? Was it not that holy detachment from an environment of which *they* were products? The contemporaries of Jesus were more or less creatures of circumstances, slaves of the god of "things-as-they-are." But his



life was being shaped by the eternal, and he endured "as seeing Him who is invisible."

It was the devotional life of Jesus, his courageous habits of faith, that set him apart from all others and formed the concrete basis of his unique character. It was nurtured through an assiduous study of the Scriptures, and it involved constant volitional effort and assimilation of their divine treasures. Other comparatively harmless attractions and distractions had to be kept in their place. Wayward thoughts and impulses had to be severely disciplined in the interests of a high and holy purpose. Real piety is a rare achievement and taxes one's resources to the very utmost. None but the heroic can ever hope to scan its horizons and to plumb its depths. Jesus, however, reached its highest pinnacle, and has thereby established his uniqueness beyond all dispute. His *spiritual* preëminence is unquestioned.

Another means at the disposal of Jesus for the enlarging and enriching of his spiritual life was the heritage of *prayer*. It is obvious that no reading of the Scriptures, no devotional reflection, no religious moods and impulses, could possibly become effective without the formation of private habits of prayer. The heritage of prayer was inseparable from the heritage of the Scriptures. Communion with God in prayer was the divine instrument through which the Scriptures yielded their abiding message. In fact, fellowship with God was the message of the sacred writings. All assimilations were of His Spirit, and all dedications were to His service. Prayer was thus, as a form of communion with God, an actual activity of volitional absorptions and committals whose perfecting involved the perfecting of fixed habits of prayer. This task is, in the deepest sense,

neither easy nor natural. It demands unceasing vigilance, concentrated effort, heroic self-restraint and self-denial.

Prayer is concerned with spiritual values and objectives. It is the medium through which the spiritual resources and assurances of God are communicated to us in terms of visions and convictions of faith. It is the instrument through which ethical and religious ideals of thinking, feeling, and purposing are psychologically absorbed, and the culture of the life of the spirit becomes an established fact. It is the vehicle through which vagrant impulses and emotions are coördinated and sublimated, and human aspiration and volition are progressively educated and brought into line with the holy mind and will of God.

The culture of the soul through fellowship with God is always a very difficult matter, for two specific reasons. First, it demands a continuous exercise of thought, of attention, reflection, concentration, exclusion. Second, the sensuous order, the material drift of things, is dead against it, so that it always involves a courageous adventure that is based upon volitional detachment and self-discipline. Prayer meant all this for Jesus, and the formation of habits of prayer was just as hard for him as for others. It could originate only with very humble beginnings and it demanded a resolute ordering of daily thoughts and duties. For it represented an inward activity through which inner motives and constraints of fellowship with the unseen God were firmly established, and through which new thoughts and aspirations and purposes were fully organized.

Jesus, however, fulfilled all the conditions of an efficient prayer-life, and his devotional uniqueness

represents a cumulative volitional achievement of faith and freedom. He trained himself to pray, he formed habits of persistent prayer, he mastered the art of prayer. Jesus really prayed! He educated mind and body, heart and will, to serve the interests of communion with God and to reflect His eternal thoughts and purposes. He made it a daily practice to retire for prayer. He arose early, before it was yet day, to seek the face of the Father. He spent whole nights in prayer amid the solitude of the hills.

Few of the prayers of Jesus have been conserved for us. Those that we have, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer and the Intercessory Prayer in the Gospel of John, are of an ejaculatory and a fragmentary character. But the bare statement is frequently made that Jesus prayed, and that he always prayed in moments of crises and before decisions which involved important issues. He lived in the atmosphere of prayer. His whole life was a prayer and he died in the very act of prayer (Luke xxiii. 46).

A cursory examination of the two more or less complete prayers, the Lord's Prayer and the Intercessory Prayer, discloses the fact that the faith of Jesus was not apocalyptical but "spiritual." Its fundamental task was the merging of his will with the will of that ever-living God who is a spiritual reality of present experience. Both involved ethical and volitional appropriations of the Spirit of God through the medium of historic heritages which unfolded the divine purpose. Jesus put himself fully under the power of these accredited means of grace and gained a vision of God that was supremely spiritual. His prayers bear eloquent testimony to this fact.

Further, both prayer and the Scriptures were religious ordinances of the living and corporate heritage of the *Church*. In fact, they emerged within the fellowship of the Church, were preserved and protected thereby, and reflected its essential character and witness. Jesus inherited the Church. His devotional life would have been incomplete had this channel of divine revelation, this primary organ of his environmental inheritance, been neglected and ignored. Prayer and Scripture reading were established ordinances of the Church. They were inculcated and sustained by the Church and were associated as private exercises with the witness and fellowship of the Church. It was through the Church that Jesus became acquainted with both, that he learnt to appreciate their significance and to respond to their appeal, and that impulses were aroused in him which led naturally to the formation of studious and prayerful habits of life.

The Jewish Church deserves credit for its provision of the instruments, and most of all the institution, through which the devotional life of Jesus was perfected. These ordinances served, in turn, to strengthen the position of the Church. Induced by its ministry, habits of prayer and study would certainly tend to tighten the connection therewith. They would fructify in habits of church-attendance. They would resolve themselves into habits of worship and holy fellowship through which both instruments of the religious life would be continuously exercised in the interests of personal piety, and would thus be effectively conserved for posterity as objective ordinances of the visible Church.

The debt of Jesus to the Church of his day must not be underestimated. This applies more especially

to its instruments of worship, and also to certain "movements" which found their inspiration in its fellowship. Perhaps the most important of these movements was the mission of John the Baptist. This emerged within the Church and claimed its authority. Its object was to purge the Church of evils that had crept in and to reestablish personal communion with God through the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. John's ethical emphasis could not fail to appeal strongly to Jesus, and he registered his approval of John's work by submitting personally to baptism at the hands of this fearless prophet of God. Indeed, there is very good ground for believing that the ministry of the Baptist brought about the turning-point in the career of Jesus. It precipitated action. It served to clarify the mind of Jesus with regard to his divine vocation and to inspire that momentous decision which launched him upon his public life and work in history.

Jesus was thus, in the human sense, a child of the Church and a product of its fellowship. He was nurtured within its fold and formed early the habit of voluntary attendance at its services. It was there that the majesty of the Scriptures and the glory of prayer captured his youthful imagination. It was there that the vision of God and the challenge of God first came to his soul. Jesus went to church; it was his *custom* to go to church (Luke iv. 16). But Jesus was alone at church. He stood apart; he felt and saw what others did not. For the Church of his day was almost if not actually dead, and it took a great deal of moral courage to worship God in a dead Church. Nothing could ward off a conflict of ideals; the clash had to come. The Church first

ignored Jesus, then persecuted him, and at last crucified him!

In spite of this bitter and unholy opposition, Jesus never actually broke with the Church. It was still to him the repository of the Scriptures, the house of prayer, the abode of the Father. It represented a part of his historic heritage, which as such had to be honored and maintained. To support it, though, under such discouraging conditions was neither easy nor pleasurable. It demanded heroic habits of faith, of spiritual allegiance, and of consecration to the holy will of God. However, Jesus rose to the occasion and persisted in serving the highest interests of the Church even though it hounded and excommunicated him.

The devotional life of Jesus, as a volitional reality of ethical habitudes of sonship, reflects through its loyalties the actual self-formation and self-revelation of his unique spiritual character. It illustrates the concrete processes through which his uniqueness was progressively established as a human and historical achievement.

### III. THE CHALLENGING PERSONALITY

Again, we observe that the spiritual character of Jesus is religiously self-revealed as an intrinsic assertion of sovereign personality.

There are reputed "sayings" of Jesus in the records which base his centrality for the Gospel upon a unique and pervasive *self-emphasis*. This self-emphasis, precisely because it represented an activity of the inner life of Jesus, lived again in the hearts and memories of his reporters. It could as such be diversely formulated in ordinary language and remains for us a psychological fact that is in no

way affected by questions relating to the "exact" words and statements of Jesus himself. Indeed, any literal certifications of such sayings is wholly unnecessary, for it is the spiritual character of Jesus that concerns us here.

Spiritual character can disclose itself in terms only of spiritual meanings and values, and only through the medium of spiritual ventures and explorations. Its imperatives are inner constraints of conscience and character. Its ethical and religious certitudes vindicate themselves only within an environment of personal assimilations and adventures of faith. It is what Jesus says to the believing soul that is regulative for any valid appraisal of his self-affirmative character and personality.

Of course, it is wholly unwarrantable to assume that the reporters of Jesus did not grasp the gist of his sayings. We can be certain that they conserved his essential words, though not in every case as *ipsissima verba*. But some of the utterances of Jesus, such as the Parables and the Beatitudes, were of such a luminous and an aphoristic character as to facilitate *verbatim* reproductions. Their exact phraseology would impress itself indelibly upon the minds of his hearers; though, indeed, we possess no means at this late date of unearthing such deposits with any degree of certainty. But it is quite possible that the disciples memorized many of the sayings of Jesus. The Oriental world of his day depended largely upon oral traditions, and such both required and stimulated an expertness of memory which is now proverbially associated with the religious history of the Jewish people.

However, it is worth remembering that it is the "Word" of the Lord, not his bare words, which is for

faith and experience vitally important and of permanent worth. We shall therefore confine ourselves here to a survey of the spiritual character of Jesus in terms of its religious and intrinsic self-emphasis.

A very superficial glance at our records will convince us that Jesus, in some persistent manner, asserted his own personality. He is constantly turning men's attention away from his words and works to himself. It is true, indeed, that astonishment was excited by many of the sayings and doings of Jesus. His hearers were frequently stunned by his teachings. They were amazed at his healing powers and marveled at the wisdom of his words. But there are also several incidents which associate such bewilderment with his personality alone, and which center interest in the spiritual impacts of his unique character. Only two of these need be referred to by way of illustration (Matt. xxvii. 14; Mark x. 32). Who could fail to be thrilled by the dignified silence and faith of the one event and by the astounding heroism of the other? These are typical cases which bear witness to the challenging personality of Jesus. It is thus to himself, implicitly and explicitly, not to his words and works, that Jesus directs men. Our salvation centers in him, in personal and spiritual fellowship with Jesus himself (Matt. xi. 28ff.).

The centrality of Jesus himself for the Gospel is a fact not only of general portrayals, but also of explicit testimony. It makes no difference whether this testimony is expressed in terms of the exact discourse of Jesus or only in words ascribed to him; whether, that is, the records preserve his *ipsissima verba* or only reports of his teachings. The utterances as they stand represent impacts and impressions of his personality as a dynamic reality of self-



affirmation, and as a unique fact of ethical and religious sovereignty.

No attempt will be made to tabulate in detail the numerous passages that illustrate the self-reference of Jesus. They belong structurally to his reputed discourses, and any minute substantiation of his self-emphasis would require that we quote a large portion of the Gospels themselves. We shall refer, therefore, only to a few outstanding illustrations of this characteristic. These may be supplemented at will through a closer study of the records.

That Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed himself in some pervasive manner is one of the obvious facts of the Gospel narratives, emphasizing his prerogatives, his authority, his unique sonship. We may anticipate somewhat by suggesting that the significance of this self-emphasis for the accounts is not dogmatic and metaphysical but essentially ethical and religious. Meanwhile, our concern is to state the evidence for the bare fact in terms of the witness of the documents themselves. They inform us that Jesus invited men to come to him, and that he reproached others who, in spite of an apparent zeal for religion, would not come to him that they "might have life" (John v. 40). Again, he claimed some identity with the Father: identity of personality (John xiv. 9-11), identity of authority (John v. 23, 27; xiv. 24), identity of operation and activity (John v. 19ff.).

It is true that there are many other passages which refer just as emphatically to Jesus' dependence upon the Father. These indicate that the apparent contradiction will yield only to a spiritual appraisal of the existing relationship. This is but to say that such a relationship was essentially voli-

tional and ethical, not spiritistic or metaphysical. The identity of Jesus with God was not an identity of static substance but of ethical personality. "God," says Jesus, "is a Spirit"; the identity was therefore one of spirit and of life. Any interpretation of the deity of Jesus must do full justice to the volitional and devotional character of his relationship with God. The real deity of Jesus was, and is, an achieved property of his spiritual life and character.

In addition to this claim of oneness with the Father, of being the sole revealer and executive of the Father, Jesus made demands upon men for faith in himself and for self-sacrifice on his behalf such as no other religious teacher has ever made before or since (Matt. x. 34ff.). He plainly indicates that the destiny of men is now being determined by their relation to himself, in that it involves an ethical dénouement of character (Matt. xxv. 34ff.).

This self-affirmative sovereignty of Jesus singles him out from all other founders of religion. No other has ever sought to establish the fortunes of his cause upon the potencies of his personality. We can accept their teaching while rejecting their example. But Jesus will never submit to being dealt with in this easy fashion. We cannot accept his teaching and refuse him, nor can we accept him and reject his teaching. Jesus is both precept and example, teacher and Lord. He lived his Gospel; he *is* the Gospel. His words and works were ethical facts of personality, dynamic energies and activities of his inner life and character.

While we may certainly maintain that the living Jesus, the spiritual Jesus, is the central reality of the pictorial and dramatic events of the records,

shining in his own light and forging his own distinctive appeal to our moral nature, yet we must not forget that it was as a psychological reality of history that his spiritual witness formulated itself. If the significance of his appeal is to involve anything more than a merely formal and nebulous example, it must needs explicate itself in terms of basic loyalties and positive convictions. Some talk glibly of the "spirit" of Jesus while ignoring entirely its ethical and psychological postulates and constituents. They fail to observe its concrete contexts and unfoldments in history. It is then subjected to conflicting interpretations, literal and otherwise, which are inspired wholly by our private obsessions and habits of life. The spirit of Jesus is infinitely more than a vague sentiment of benevolence and of altruistic service. It is a concrete reality of ethical and religious allegiances and certitudes. In that capacity, it achieves for Jesus an authority that is imperative and ultimate as a psychological norm and constraint of ethical behavior and character.

The spirit of Jesus is, therefore, a historical reality of right thoughts, feelings, and purposes whose mandates are inclusive and ultimate. That Jesus himself was actually conscious of some such ultimateness becomes clear when we consider the "I say" and "I am" sections of the Gospels. They avowedly credit him with a certain inherence and finality of appeal. The former are peculiar to the Sermon on the Mount, in which they are antithetically introduced. Over against the "Ye have heard that it hath been said" portions, we have the "but I say unto you" pronouncements (Matt. v. 17ff.). The "I am" sections are, on the other hand, scattered freely throughout John's Gospel. They include such posi-

tive and emphatic declarations as "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection and the life" (John vi. 35; viii. 12; x. 14; xi. 25).

Such passages imply that Jesus himself is central not only for the facts about his historical career, but also for the realities of faith and experience that he mediates and inspires. These latter constitute, as historical and experiential facts, far more than a revelation of his inner life. They involve also a direct and mandatory arraignment of ours. Indeed, they emerge primarily only in this guise.

What, however, is the *ultimate* character and significance of this self-emphasis of Jesus in the narratives? We have thus far considered it as if it were a mere matter of words and overt declarations. But the fact that we can neither discover nor guarantee any such exact sayings and certified utterances goes to prove two things. First, it makes it quite clear that we cannot build any system of doctrine about Jesus upon an external foundation of words and texts. These possess value only as reflections of psychological impacts, impressions, and situations. Second, it implies that the self-affirmation of Jesus was not primarily an affair of speech but of *personality*. It relates not to the actual words of Jesus, but to the dynamic witness of his spiritual character. It was a fact of his challenging personality.

No doubt Jesus did declare himself in a positive manner, and in language that was approximately reproduced in the accounts. The most that we can guarantee, however, is that his "meanings" were preserved; though, indeed, this involves some reproduction of his exact words. But there are many ways of saying the same thing, and it is evident

that the reporters of Jesus bore witness not to his *ipsissima verba*, but to those religious properties and certitudes of his inner life which were symbolically expressed in versatile utterances and performances. They conserved what he said to their "souls" through his sayings and doings. This, of course, involved some verbal reproductions which are now entirely beyond recognition and recovery.

We conclude, then, that the self-emphasis of Jesus is not a literal affair of dogmatic and oracular statements, but an intangible and atmospheric reality of psychological qualities that inhered in the dynamic witness of his spiritual character. It was his personality that asserted itself. It did so as a fact of ethical and religious virtues which were intrinsically and uniquely authoritative. The self-emphasis of Jesus was ethically based and religiously constituted.

Some account of the development of the personality of Jesus has already been given. We have observed that his spiritual character represented a progressive achievement of heroic faith and practice. This process was marked by the emergence of insights and certitudes which modified behavior, and which existed in the first instance only as affirmative properties of personality. The self-emphasis of Jesus was thus the product of that obedience to God which issued in confidence in God, in the knowledge of His will, in the experience and power of sonship. It reflected that unity of mind and will with the purpose of God which released certitudes of faith, and that fellowship of the spirit which convinced Jesus of his unique vocation as the revealer of God and the mediator of eternal salvation. His self-emphasis belongs essentially to the realm of religious faith and experience. It is the fruit not of identity of

substance but of spiritual consecration. It is vital only in relation to the volitional properties that are involved in its life-context, in terms of which it obtains a threefold significance for personal life.

First, the self-emphasis of Jesus represents a *volitional energy of consecration*. It is the self-emphasis of Jesus, of that personality which was uniquely authoritative in virtue of what he was and is and ever will be. It existed organically in his consciousness as a religious certitude of divine "mission" and "possession" that was inwardly endorsed and vindicated by the witness of the spirit. It reflected that unreserved volitional communion with the Father which Jesus enjoyed and maintained throughout his brief career.

Some have not hesitated to charge Jesus with an objectionable self-assertiveness. But to resolve his self-emphasis into self-assertion, as this word is usually employed, would be to misname it altogether. The former was rooted in that fellowship with God through which Jesus became the living voice of God in the world. It speaks to us, therefore, not as an isolated and arbitrary self, but as a self that was wholly consecrated to the will and purpose of the Father; as a self that was wholly possessed by the Spirit of the Father. The self-emphasis of Jesus is the product of perfect communion, obedience, devotion, and sonship. Jesus could say "I am the bread of life" because he could also say "I and the Father are one," one in volitional purpose and character. His self-emphasis was the expression of a completely dedicated will through which the will of God was made manifest to men. The inner will of Jesus was God-directed, and its self-affirmation reflected an actual process of volitional consecration.

It asserted an ideal of living that Jesus was actually pursuing. This constituted the very essence of his challenging personality. The will of Jesus expressed in behavior the holy will of the Father.

Second, the self-emphasis of Jesus represents *an ethical reality of character*. It was an assertion of his spiritual character as a fact of moral obedience, consecration, and achievement. The result was a "spiritual mind" which gave rise to religious visions and tasks and certitudes. For the actual formation of habits of character would progressively issue in triumphs of character which would be accompanied by a conscious experience of moral and religious "inherences," by a growing comprehension of eternal values, and by an intrinsic sense of personal vocation and authority.

To say, for instance, that "I am I" is not merely to assert oneself. It is, rather, to call attention to an existential and objective fact of individual consciousness. The self-emphasis of Jesus must be viewed in this light. When he says "I am the light of the world," he is but emphasizing an existential fact of spiritual consciousness and character. His authority was neither innate nor arbitrary, but was the ethical product of a unique spiritual character which had been volitionally achieved in fellowship with God. It involved a consciousness of the essential sovereignty and ultimateness of all ethical and religious commitments and habitudes. It reflected that self-attesting witness of personal character which formulated the claims and determined the task of Jesus in history. Jesus was actually "the light of the world" in the sense that his uniqueness of character, his challenging personality, was a historical fact of unique ethical vision, piety, and

power. His inner mind was God-possessed. It embodied the spiritual mind of the Father.

Third, the self-emphasis of Jesus represents *a religious activity of revelation*. The self of Jesus, his inner consciousness, was organically rooted in its environment of life and the moral order. This was so in a universal and inclusive sense. Jesus was so perfectly at one with God and the moral order that the Father's mandates and appeals must necessarily emerge in history in the concrete form of his own unique self-emphasis. He was so responsive to the total appeal of life that his spiritual character became thereby mandatory and revelatory of the entire cosmos in its ethical and religious capacities, and in relation to its fundamental properties and significances.

The authority of Jesus is thus intrinsically personal and spiritual. Every self is in life as a plant is in the ground, and it becomes, in proportion to the measure of its adjustments and appropriations, a dynamic vehicle of life's meaning and power. For example, the health-producing resources of nature are fully manifested only through the medium of that perfect health of body which is the fruit of complete responses to, and assimilations of, our physical environment. Nature's revelations proceed through the channel of coöperation with her laws. The same holds true also of our spiritual environment. The universe unfolds its immortal imperatives and certitudes only through the medium of personality, and all self-life is therefore in some degree an activity of universal life. Given a personality whose identification with the enviroing whole is complete, we have a perfect organ of divine revelation. Jesus fulfilled this condition, and the religious



certitudes that emerged within this fellowship of spirit represented dynamic operations and unfoldments of the living God Himself in history. The self-emphasis of Jesus reflected thereby an ultimate religious proclamation of the divine order itself. His spirit was God-inspired, and it disclosed in history the living Spirit of the Father.

We have assumed, for illustrative purposes, that Jesus did actually express himself in the exact words attributed to him in John's Gospel. This question is, however, a very unimportant one, and does not in any way affect the course of our argument. The positiveness of Jesus was not a matter of words but of personality. Christian experience vindicates this spiritual estimate and interpretation of his self-emphasis in two ways.

In the first place, it is just this kind of assertiveness that is involved in experiences of the inner sovereignty of Jesus when we come under the power of his living spirit. He reproduces in our souls his essential witness and authority, and experience itself testifies to their ethical and religious character. His self-emphasis, as an ethical and a religious unfoldment of spiritual character, is continuously alive in experiences and confessions of faith. It is an undeniable fact that Jesus does exercise an authority over the believing soul that is ultimate for Christian behavior and character, and that this authority is specifically inward and spiritual. Its essential nature is defined not in terms of the overt teachings of Jesus, but in terms of what we get from him when we respond to his appeal. We get from him not oracles but a renaissance of soul, a transformation of thought and practice, an enlargement and enrichment of spiritual life.

In the second place, the assertiveness of Jesus, as a fact of personality, possesses actual significance for Christian faith and experience only in so far as it embodies and releases energies of character formation. But to do this, to affect personality at all, its appeal must be autonomously mediated, formulated, and appropriated. It must be adaptable in the sense that it invites and induces indigenous, versatile, and progressive responses of faith. This, however, would be wholly inconsistent with any standardized, any literal or statutory, system of oracular pronouncements. It could be compatible only with an existential self-affirmation of personality, and especially of that challenging personality of Jesus which functions autonomously as the norm of Christian conduct and character.

Our object, in this brief survey, has been to get back to the personal and experiential basis, to the life-context, of the self-emphasis of Jesus. We have found that its certitudes were religious fruits of ethical and spiritual character whose authority must be defined in terms of the inherences and imperatives of faith and freedom. They emerged primarily as dynamic facts and forces of personality which found expression in character before they were definitely formulated in words and teachings. This is but to say that these certitudes originated as modes of spiritual behavior whose self-affirmative properties were unfoldments of the inherent constraints of life itself.

Life always comes before thought. The self-emphasis of Jesus involved, therefore, an objective assertion of spiritual life. It was a reality of ethical insight and religious power, of spiritual influence and example, which was devotionally achieved and

consummated. It was the unique character, the sovereign personality, of Jesus that emphasized itself and is thus self-revealed in all its affirmative processes and relationships.

#### IV. THE FULLNESS OF GRACE

We remark, finally, that the spiritual character of Jesus is redemptively self-revealed as a vitalizing energy of renewing grace.

Ultimately, the self-assertion of Jesus is life-assertion and God-assertion. Its realm is a sphere of saving grace. It represents an existential affirmation of objective values and potencies which emerge and function in personality as religious products and constraints of conscience and character. It reflects those certitudes of sonship which, through their gracious psychological impacts, lead to an awakening of our spiritual nature that fructifies in experiences of renewing grace. Such experiences are guaranteed to us by that fullness of the grace and power of God which is historically embodied in the unique spiritual character of Jesus.

It is therefore God and the moral order that are organically self-revealed to us in the consecration, the character, and the self-affirmation of Jesus. They are so manifested not abstractly in the form of nebulous ideas, nor empirically in the guise of standardized events, but ethically and religiously as redemptive agencies and energies of personal life. God gives to His own the witness and power of His Spirit, and that Spirit found in Jesus perfect embodiment and redemptive scope. God has in this sense spoken His "last word" to us in His Son.

The ultimate self-unfoldment of the spiritual character of Jesus must proceed in terms of the sav-

ing properties and achievements, the redemptive operations and triumphs, of his living spirit in personal life and history. The character of Jesus is a fact of divine power and grace and its vitality is being continuously reproduced in the unique changes it brings about. Indeed, it survives only in its transformative products in history as a regenerative reality of saving grace. It is unfolded only through what it can and does accomplish in human hearts, that is, only through its personal effects, its creative fruits, in the lives of others. The "grace" of Jesus is the dominant characteristic of his personality. It is the very essence of the good news, the soul of the kingdom, the secret of his uniqueness.

Our task, at this point, is to define the self-revelation of Jesus in terms of his renewing grace. The Gospels bear witness to this recreative potency of his spiritual character in a twofold manner: through detailed accounts of his saving influence, and through dramatic portrayals of his personal witness. Both reflect the arresting and arraiging and transforming power of his unique personality.

We shall deal first with those facts and results recorded in the Gospels which illustrate the saving grace of Jesus. Limits of space will not permit any elaborate tabulation of relevant incidents. Two or three, as typical cases, will suffice to unfold the spiritual character of Jesus in terms of its recreative potencies as a historical energy of spiritual life. They will call attention to its power to induce repentance, to create faith in God, and to renew the soul in righteousness. The facts will speak for themselves.

First, there is the account of Peter's denial of Jesus (Luke xxii. 54-62). The writer remarks that,

after Peter had denied him thrice, "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." Then he goes on to say that Peter "went out and wept bitterly." Not a word was spoken. But some gracious and regenerative energy of repentance was instantaneously released through a mere look of Jesus, which put Peter to shame and rescued him from the clutches of sin.

What was there in that casual and silent look of the Master that stirred in this disciple's breast the pangs of remorse and repentance? For others crucified him later without turning a hair! What was in that passing glance that pierced the erring soul of Peter? We reply that it was the look of *Jesus*, behind which and in which there was concentrated the appeal of a holy life. Once before, the presence of the Master had aroused in Peter an overwhelming sense of his guilt and shame. On that occasion "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke v. 8). Have we not here two realistic illustrations of that convicting power of the spiritual character of Jesus, of that arraigning energy of holiness, which disturbs conscience and heart and makes for reconciliation? The very look of Jesus reflected the holy background of his personal will. It possessed that gracious power to awaken the soul, to stimulate a sense of sin, and to induce a repentance which issued in a return to the Father. That look was endowed with the potencies of a holy life, with the constraints of a holy example. It revealed the holy personality of Jesus.

Second, we have the incident of the epileptic boy out of whom Jesus cast an unclean spirit (Mark ix. 17-27). The boy's father called Jesus' attention to

the condition of his son, described his infirmity in detail, and begged Jesus to heal him. The Master replied: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The father's response was immediate: "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The cure was then effected, and the boy was helped to his feet and restored to the care of his father.

What was there in the mere presence of Jesus, and in his pronouncement relating to the unlimited potencies of faith, that helped the boy's father to a larger faith in God? Jesus himself was an energy of faith. His words were forces of faith. These latter were precepts born of example; indeed they were formulations of example and as such were creative agencies of spiritual behavior and character. The whole incident in all its descriptive details, even in the taking of the boy by the hand and lifting him up on his feet again, throbs with the living faith of Jesus. It unfolds the recuperative properties of that spiritual character of Jesus which healed in response to a faith which it evoked and inspired. The very words of Jesus possessed the power to create faith in God, precisely because they were themselves dynamic expressions and activities of faith in the Father. They were faith forces that reflected the courageous background of his personal mind and possessed the creative power to beget and enlarge faith in all who came under his power. They disclosed the creative personality of Jesus.

Third, there is the striking case of the conversion of Zaccheus the publican (Luke xix. 1-10). Zaccheus was "the chief among the publicans, and he was rich." But, as a publican, a collector of Roman

taxes, he enjoyed the unenviable reputation of an outcast and a renegade. Many of his profession were also extortioners, and he himself was probably not guiltless in this respect. Jesus, however, passed through Jericho, where Zaccheus resided, and the citizens assembled *en masse* to catch a glimpse of him. Zaccheus was among them. Being a small man, he was lost in the throng and could not see Jesus "for the press." He forthwith climbed a sycamore tree. It was there that Jesus spied him and bade him come down to be his host for the day. So impressed was this old publican by such generous treatment that "he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully."

We have no record of what Jesus said to Zaccheus in the privacy of his home. We do know that the result of his gracious friendship was that this old publican determined to be a better man. Zaccheus rose immediately to the occasion: "Behold, Lord," he said, "the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." This heroic resolution drew from Jesus the instant response: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." What was there in the friendship of Jesus that brought about this wonderful change in the life of Zaccheus? We reply that it expressed a functioning of the divine, a regenerative operation of grace, which was rooted in the divine sympathy, understanding, and faith in humanity of the very soul of Jesus. The friendship of Jesus reflected the compassionate background of his personal spirit. It possessed the vitalizing power to renew the soul in righteousness. It manifested the redeeming personality of Jesus.

The spiritual character of Jesus is therefore self-

revealed in its threefold power to induce repentance, to create faith, to renew character, as a redemptive energy of saving grace. The story of the conversion of Zaccheus illustrates the actual "process" of personal salvation, its gracious inspiration and its psychological method. It portrays the activity of Jesus as a recreative activity of love that begets love and thereby transforms the soul. It thus identifies the fundamental realities of the Gospel with the transformative properties and potencies of the spiritual character of Jesus as the embodiment of divine grace.

The foregoing incidents have been selected at random from a veritable host of similar events that are conserved in the records. They are not by any means the most forcible or unique in their capacity as self-unfoldments of the spiritual character of Jesus. The Gospels clearly yield first place, in this respect, to those facts which belong to our second classification, namely, to those that are reflected in dramatic portrayals of the personal witness of Jesus.

One very striking feature of the Gospel narratives is their *realism*. The original reporters of Jesus were gifted with a flair for reality. They were "sons of fact" who stuck close to the circumstantial in all their narrations. All their accounts are therefore occasional and fragmentary. They embody graphic memoirs and impressions of a unique personality which defied classification and beggared description, and must be left to speak for itself. The result is that the details of the story of Jesus are characterized by an artless respect for the "incidental," thus allowing the inherent glory of Jesus to shine in its own light and to make its own native appeal to our souls.

This is true in general of the accounts. Their



writers were not theorists but practical men, and their compositions were all inspired by practical needs and situations. However, we are now concerned more especially with those specific incidents which unveil the spiritual character of Jesus through the medium of realistic and unadorned sketches of his personal behavior and example.

By far the most impressive and unforgettable events of the evangelical records are those which illustrate the inherent power and grace of the personality of Jesus. These represent incidents whose fugitive details were so dramatic and soul-stirring that, in their presence, the reporters felt helpless to make any comments. They could do no more than to allude in a very casual fashion to some personal and realistic features that were outstanding. Beyond that they were dumb. They bent their heads in reverent silence! Such events baffled interpretation, and were left to make their own intrinsic witness and appeal. All that the reporters could accomplish in such circumstances, overwhelmed as they were by the amazing conduct of Jesus, was to preserve with artless simplicity a few fragmentary touches and impressions that would reflect the exact situations. They invest the figure of Jesus thereby with those stark properties of reality, with those self-revealing attributes of spiritual character, which make their own incomparable appeal to the hearts of men.

Two incidents, already referred to, illustrate this inherent witness of the challenging personality of Jesus. One relates to his heroic determination to meet his fate in Jerusalem (Mark x. 32), and the other to his eloquent silence before Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 14). Both call attention to the wonder and

amazement that Jesus' personality alone inspired. Many other incidents belong also to this class (*e.g.*, Luke xxii. 61; xxiii. 47-48; John xviii. 6).

The events associated with the passion of Jesus are largely, if not entirely, of this self-revealing and self-appealing character. This is true in lesser degree of the whole story of Jesus. It is his sovereign personality, as a dynamic reality of unique behavior, that is mirrored and projected in all the accounts. These bear witness to the fact that the inner character of Jesus belongs ultimately to the realm of mystery, and that its uniqueness consists precisely in its mystery, the mystery of freedom, of godliness, of personality itself. The self-unfoldment of Jesus must necessarily resolve itself, in the last analysis, into a revelation of his "inexplicableness," which is progressively formulated in terms of those unanalyzable emotions of wonder and amazement that are excited by his unique personal witness and example.

The Evangelists were wonderfully successful in conserving this atmosphere of divine mystery, with its concomitants of awe and wonder, in relation to the personal life of Jesus. But this mystery is neither theurgical nor metaphysical. It is rather the mystery of the grace of God in Jesus; the mystery of the ethical and religious devotion of Jesus, and of those renewing reactions of faith that were inspired and sustained by his spiritual behavior and character. This mystery lends itself to metaphysical speculations relating to the cosmic affiliations of Jesus. But the same applies, in its own sphere, to the mystery of the poet Shakespeare. We cannot, however, get behind the inductive facts and horizons of history. Philosophical speculations concerning ultimate origins may indeed be inevitable. But they

lead nowhere, and their results can never be anything other than unproved hypotheses. We start, therefore, with our given facts just as they are, and we assume axiomatically that all relevant values emerge in history and are achievements of history.

Paradoxically the spiritual character of Jesus is self-revealed in terms of the *mystery* of his unique personality. It is historically disclosed through the medium of those realistic details of his personal witness which, in virtue of their very uniqueness and inexplicableness, made such an indelible impression upon the minds and hearts of the early disciples as to issue in experiences of saving grace. These experiences represented actual operations of the spiritual character of Jesus, and its inherent properties and potencies were self-unfolded in history in terms of the redemptive changes that it precipitated in personal life.

However, the particular incidents that reflect the unique personal witness of Jesus did not create the reactions of faith with which they were associated. The very first contact was essentially a spiritual contact with life itself, and such events were therefore not causes but formulations of spiritual experience. They reflect subjective experiences of faith, apart from which they would never have come to light at all. The events were simultaneous with such experiences, not anterior to them. In fact, they existed originally only *in* these experiences; that is, they *were* experiences.

Here we come into direct contact with the objective witness of life itself, and the mystery of Jesus unfolds itself as an experiential reality of the more abundant life. It was the living personality of Jesus, not unique incidents, that inspired reactions

of faith. The events concerned are only illustrations of significances that had already emerged in personal experiences of saving grace. It follows that the self-revelation of the spiritual character of Jesus in the records is personal and experiential. It resolves itself into a subjective self-unfoldment of the redemptive properties and potencies of that unique character, which is expressed in terms of the vitalizing experiences of faith that it induced and that produced the records themselves. This character is therefore self-revealed not in mere words and events and records, but in those psychological reactions of faith it stimulated and are illustrated in all its external contexts and products.

Obviously, it was the unique personality of Jesus that asserted itself. It did this through communion and consecration, through speech and action, and through that response and submission of faith which it induced and justified. The records are, in the very nature of the case, both casual and fragmentary. Whether we have the exact words of Jesus or not is a matter of little value and importance. For we certainly have words that disclose the impacts, emphases, and potencies of his spiritual character in terms of the impressions and experiences it produced in personal life. And this is all that we need for any real understanding of Jesus and the Gospel.

Jesus was all to his disciples that they claimed for him. His unique authority was vindicated in their own inner experiences of his ethical sovereignty and redemptive sufficiency. The ultimate fact about Jesus was for them the unique fact of his saving grace, through which the self-revelation of his spiritual character is being progressively formulated and consummated in history.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VICARIOUS MINISTRY

#### I. THE BASIC ELEMENT

RELIGION and life are rooted in mystery, and it is what we can feel but cannot fully understand that exercises the greatest influence over our lives. This applies particularly to the doctrine of the "vicariousness" of Jesus.

It was through what was inexplicable, but yet possessed experiential potencies, in the personal witness of Jesus that he touched the hearts of men and brought them into living contact with the redemptive presence and power of God Himself. His vicariousness is an inherent property of his unique behavior and example. It represents a well-attested fact of history and of spiritual experience which can be neither ignored nor consistently denied.

However, no doctrine has suffered more at the hands of its friends than this doctrine of the vicariousness of Jesus. It has been fearfully abused, falsified, and even perverted. It has been mechanized, legalized, standardized, externalized and de-personalized. The doctrine has been formulated in such a way as to offend our moral and religious sentiments and to call forth protests from both reason and faith. It has been resolved into a soulless affair of texts and theologies, of ancient concepts and categories, that relate to a dead past, and has thus been torn

from its experiential context in the ever-living present. This has resulted in the substitution of plans and schemes for personal experiences of Jesus, and in the transference of emphasis from his unique appeal to some oracular appeal which cannot stand on its own legs but must needs totter along on apologetical crutches.

Any fruitful discussion of the vicariousness of Jesus must determine its basic element at the very outset. It must make clear what is vicarious in the personal witness of Jesus. It must elucidate those fundamental postulates upon which the scriptural doctrine is based. We shall enumerate and briefly consider three such postulates.

First, the vicariousness of Jesus is not a fact of empirical events but of spiritual personality.

Vicariousness is structural in the moral order. It belongs essentially to the mystery of things. This mystery is indeed concentrated therein; in fact, vicariousness is the mystery itself. It is a property of all personal life and it encompasses it with that atmosphere of mystery which is inseparable from personality. The vicariousness of Jesus is not, then, a matter of overt deeds and events in history. It is his personality, his spiritual character, that was and is vicarious. It was his inner mind and spirit that embodied all his potencies and his gifts to men. He "gave *himself* for our sins" (Gal. i. 4), "*He* is our peace" (Eph. ii. 14), God was in *him* "reconciling the world unto Himself" (II Cor. v. 19). The witness of Jesus was certainly unfolded through the medium of external events. But it was in nowise identical with these, for all such events are inherently fractional, occasional, and ephemeral.

It follows that faith in Jesus is not the imper-

sonal acceptance of a historical and dogmatic system of events and beliefs about Jesus. These are not the saving facts of the Gospel. It is Jesus alone who saves through the gift of his spirit and through his indwelling presence in our hearts. Faith is, accordingly, the acceptance of *him*, the committal of our souls to *him* in simple trust. The new thing, the wonder, the mystery, of the Gospel is Jesus himself. It was the mystery of godliness, of God "manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. iii. 16). His vicariousness was an intrinsic reality of his spiritual character.

Second, the vicariousness of Jesus is not a fact of post-mortem results but of historical life.

This is to say that it was not the death of Jesus but rather his life that was vicarious. Indeed, this was the fundamental characteristic of his whole career. His brief history had, of course, its great crises, its climactic dénouements, in which the revelation of this vicariousness appeared at its maximum. This is particularly true of the death of Jesus. But still, its significance was a cumulative fact of his sonship, of his obedience, of his heroic consecration, of his vicarious life. There is, indeed, a very profound sense in which the passion of Jesus represents something more than a merely static vicariousness, more than a subjective unfoldment of some vicariousness that was structural in his life in a fixed and complete form. The death of Jesus represented a human and dynamic *achievement* of vicariousness. It registered the volitional perfecting of his spiritual character, and it mediated thereby a complete and final revelation of the grace of God in history.

Certain objective benefits have accrued to the world as impersonal fruits of the passion of Jesus.

But it was the holy life, the gracious purpose, the devoted will, of Jesus that gave meaning to his passion. He deliberately chose the cross in preference to the "safe" path. He laid down his life freely (John x. 17-18). The saving significance of the cross is thus inseparably associated with the volitional courage of faith and devotion to the will of God that characterized the whole period of his earthly career. His vicariousness was an achieved property of his historical sonship.

Third, the vicariousness of Jesus is not a fact of legal contracts but of reconciling grace.

The life and death of Jesus have bequeathed to men many incomparable gifts of grace. They have released recreative influences of personal faith and example, transformative energies of behavior and character, which have brought the living God nearer to our souls and have encompassed us with the resources of eternal salvation. Jesus did actually accomplish something for "us" and for the "world" through his passion which has changed the whole face of things. This was the fruit of his vicariousness. It is his vicariousness. The latter is an energy of personal love which renders service and achieves benefits for others. But in such a world as ours, both sacrifice and suffering are inevitably involved in this ministry of grace, and it must be formulated in terms of the self-oblation of the cross. Jesus has thus blessed us only by suffering for us and in our place in that his gifts to the world had to be, under existing conditions, products of heroic faith and sacrificial love on the part of some one or other.

What Jesus suffered on the cross was suffered once, for all, and in the place of all. It is in this sense that his vicariousness was both "representa-



tive" and "substitutionary," and that it was historically maximized and consummated in the suffering love of the cross. The vicarious element in the life of Jesus was never an outward thing of impersonal events and forensic contracts, but rather an inward and a personal energy of renewing grace. Its significance is a fact of experiential faith which unfolds itself only in the fellowship of the spirit of Jesus. His vicariousness is a redemptive potency of his reconciling sacrifice.

Vicariousness is thus essentially a fact of grace, and grace is the very soul of vicariousness. For grace is inherently sacrificial, and its nature is to go all the way even unto death. It is love on its knees in the service of others. Its concern is for the whole, its field is the universe, and its passion is for God and humanity. It dies to live. It finds life in yielding it up. It survives in its redemptive products. It is an energy of self-obliteration and self-oblation. And it is greater than sin, for it destroys sin and establishes righteousness in the soul and upon the earth. Grace exercises the invincible constraint of a love that outlasts our perversity and will not let us go.

What Jesus accomplished for us through his vicarious passion was not legal emancipation from sin, from the devil, and from the wrath of God. Rather, he revealed the holy love, the saving grace, of the Father which redeems the world, woos us from our sins, moves men to repentance and newness of life. Jesus achieved for us, through his heroic faith and sacrificial love, an invasion of the grace of God in history which has transformed our spiritual environment, has enriched life and personality, has released reconciling energies of spiritual renewal,

and has brought eternal life within the reach of all as a free gift of faith.

Such are our principles of interpretation. They imply that the vicariousness of Jesus is a volitional fact of spiritual character, of historical sonship, of reconciling sacrifice. It is a reality of inner meanings and potencies, of faith and grace. The whole earthly ministry of Jesus was intrinsically vicarious, and its basic element was his personal love.

We shall now consider this vicarious ministry in terms of its social properties, its sacrificial operations, its cosmic potencies, and its personal significances.

## II. THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The ministry of Jesus was vicarious in that its spirit of love was essentially social.

What is love? Is it not that attachment to the social whole which suffers for it and serves its interests? It is a spiritual energy of cosmic cohesion in which the significance of life is reflected, through which its challenge is elucidated, and by which its potencies are developed and sustained. In short, it is the spirit of the whole.

The entire ministry of Jesus was fundamentally vicarious in that it represented a social unfoldment of his spirit of love. Its motive was love, its instrument was sacrifice, and its scope was universal. This ministry concerned itself with permanent needs and truths. It involved a service which affected the welfare of all in that its interests were spiritually inclusive and ultimate. All have therefore benefited thereby. The whole life of Jesus was vicarious in the twofold sense that the Father's will was his supreme concern, and that all sacrificial work of

this order achieves something for others and for the world at large.

Further, the kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated was essentially social in its ideals and fellowship. This much, at least, can be said in favor of the *social Gospel*. The Gospel itself, as a dynamic reality of the personal love of Jesus, is an evangel of social aims and objectives. It must be socially applied; it cannot live otherwise. Indeed, the alternatives are either such application or no application at all. For love is inherently other-regarding and expresses itself in altruistic aims and services. The earthly career of Jesus illustrates this fact. He was no monk, no hermit. He lived among men, he loved them, he served them beyond all other benefactors of mankind. His all too brief life was crammed with sacrificial deeds and ministrations, and he died for men. No one can do more than that!

All anti-social tendencies in the Christian and in the Church disclose a serious defect of love for both God and man, and they involve as such a radical negation of the spirit of Jesus. His message and that of the early Church were supremely social, and their pragmatic fruits in history were intrinsically social in a unique degree. It was precisely because the Gospel was then socially applied that it achieved those amazing triumphs of faith which have immortalized the age of the Apostles.

However, the social Gospel is sometimes formulated in such a way as to involve very grave perils. The practice of resolving Jesus into a social courtier, or even into a social agitator, has surely been overdone. To style him, on the one hand, a "good mixer" is highly offensive; for he was preëminently a prophet of righteousness. To reduce him, on the

other hand, to the level of a "social reformer" in the accepted sense is to ignore entirely the specific content of his message. The righteousness with which he was concerned is inward and spiritual. Again, the social emphasis tends to resolve the "social" into an impersonal, a material, and a massed affair of environmental determinants. But what right have we to define the term in this gross sense? All social relations are relations between persons, relations of spirit with spirit. Every social problem is ultimately, in that case, a *spiritual* problem.

Opponents of the social conception of the Gospel have thus rightly protested that Jesus was concerned with the inward life of the individual. But this protest misses the point at issue in that there is no real antithesis between the individual order and the social order. Jesus regarded the individual as a social being, and he centered his attention upon the individual precisely because there was no other way of leavening the social organism. His concern was with the individual in his social capacities. He sought to change men inwardly and one by one just because the social order is a spiritual fact and is made up of individuals. This order can be reconstructed only from the inside, that is, not through any massed and impersonal modifications of material environment, but through personal and spiritual transformations of behavior and character.

The protest referred to is, then, wholly irrelevant in so far as it is inspired by an atomic conception of the individual which reduces him to the status of a "private" being. This view is far too prevalent in some quarters to-day. It is based upon a theory of the Gospel that deprives it of all ethical content, subsidizes social indifference and exploitation, and

cancels thereby all the real obligations of discipleship. There is no such private being and no such private salvation. For, as Paul reminds us, "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. xiv. 7).

There can, accordingly, be no two opinions as to the social emphases and significances of the Gospel. To ask whether that Gospel was individual or social is to create a false antithesis. Such a distinction is purely relative and is based upon two aspects of personal life. The appeal of the Gospel is both individual and social. These terms are complementary, not mutually exclusive. They represent a distinction *within*, not *without*, personality. Our present concern, however, is with the social Gospel. We note that both the kingdom of God and the Church are social concepts, that they reflect a fellowship, and that both were inevitable fruits of the Gospel. The Church itself was a spiritual organism that was composed of all those who had embraced the "new life" in Christ. Its program was uniquely social from the very beginning. Its fellowship was based upon a personal experience of salvation which issued in ethical reconstructions of social behavior and character (Eph. ii. 1-3; Col. iii. 1ff.).

The real question at issue concerns the meaning of the term "social." What exactly is "social" service? Is it a fact of reform movements whose main objective is economic change, and whose chief instrument is sumptuary legislation? Is it an impersonal affair of bureaucratic formulas, statistics, and massed panaceas which deal with the social order only in bulk? Is it primarily a material service whose interest is in the outward life of man and represents an end in itself? Are the social and

the sociological identical? Do these applications of the term really reflect the essence of the social, and is vicariousness to be defined accordingly?

Our reply to all the preceding questions must be an emphatic negative. We have seen that the individual is a spiritual being, that all relations are spiritual relations between persons, that the social order is made up of individuals, and that this order is therefore spiritually constituted and determined. The social is inherently personal and spiritual. It involves an inner relationship between persons, a relationship of personal love. No gospel and no service is ultimately social whose program is not inward and spiritual, whose instrument is not vicarious sacrifice, and whose goal is not a fellowship of love. The vicariousness of the social is a fact of sacrificial love. The social is love; for "God is Love" (I John iv. 16).

Jesus defined the kingdom of God as a kingdom of love, the holy love of the Father. On the human side, however, it represents a spiritual commonwealth of regenerated souls whose redemption has been effected through the vicarious power of sacrificial love. To seek this kingdom as an inner reality of fellowship with God, to pursue its interests upon earth as a kingdom of loving hearts, and to put it first in our lives, is to find that *rhythm* of living which guarantees all our temporal needs (Matt. vi. 33). It is all a question of right emphasis, of good management, for the spiritual order has the material order in its service, not *vice versa*. Back of every problem is the problem of renewing a right spirit, the spirit of love, within men.

It is becoming quite the fashion to-day to discredit Jesus on the ground that he did not anticipate the

social problems of our modern world and does not therefore offer us any empirical guidance in the matter of their solution. This criticism is both feeble and unjust. It betrays an utter inability to appreciate the permanent significance not only of Jesus but also of any other religious teacher of mankind.

A very superficial reading of the Gospels will convince us that Jesus was far more concerned with spiritual attitudes and dispositions than with so-called social problems. For this reason he had little or nothing to say about the social complexities and perplexities of his own day in their merely external aspects. Jesus seldom, if ever, attacked social customs and institutions. All social evils were to him spiritual matters of inner motives, attitudes, purposes, habits of character. He therefore denounced social injustice and exploitation as spiritual evils, as personal facts of selfish aims and interests which betrayed a total lack of neighborly love. It was the underlying ideals that he repudiated. It was an unloving character that he excoriated. These were to Jesus the fundamental social evils of his day. Are they not the ultimate evils of every age, the evils which blast all social schemes and utopias?

History has endorsed both Jesus' view of the social problem and his method of dealing with it. His emphasis upon the inner life of the spirit, and his renewal of the hearts of men through the vicarious and sacrificial ministry of personal love, have done far more to redeem the human race from the social curse of sin and selfishness than all the social slogans, panaceas, and millenniums of the specialists.

Jesus talked little about things, but he went to work. He inculcated ethical and religious principles and ideals of a revolutionary character, whose

social significance was far-reaching and whose inner sanctions were structural and universal. Jesus leavened the minds and hearts of his disciples with these new teachings, and he enforced them by both precept and example. Reconstructive and redemptive forces were thus released which, in the course of time, undermined the very foundations of age-long customs and hoary institutions. The ministry of Jesus was preëminently social in that its concern was with inner righteousness, with personal dispositions and dedications, with the rebirth of the human spirit. Jesus went to the root of the matter and proposed to change environments by first changing men. In this campaign the primary instrument of reconstruction is not legislation nor social revolution, but the education of the human spirit through that fellowship of redeeming grace which inspires and sustains the growth of Christian character. The new order of life must wait for the new order of men!

Some will no doubt still maintain that love is no solution to the social problem. Our reply is that there is no other, and unless we are willing to accept the challenge of Jesus, the challenge of sacrificial love, we may as well give up the problem as insoluble. This way took Jesus to the cross, and the way of the cross is the only approach that can resolve the social problem into a social fellowship.

Love is invincible (I Cor. xiii. 8). It always does its best; it gives all and holds nothing back. It went, in the case of Jesus, even unto the cross, thus yielding to his vicarious ministry its maximum context. If love is not the supreme social unifier, then what is? Wherever there is love there is always a sharing of goods and some effort to equalize oppor-



tunities. There is always a sacrificial attempt to improve conditions for others and a spirit of service which strives to democratize and universalize the sphere of human fellowship. Love will use all means at its disposal to achieve the desired result, social, economic, legislative, and otherwise. But all our empirical schemes and methods, without this personal and vicarious love, are nothing (I Cor. xiii. 1ff.). They are worse than useless. Love alone is the cement of universal brotherhood. As Paul says, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10). Jesus, before him, resolved the whole of religion into a service of love (Matt. xxii. 36-40).

The goal of all reform should be release of personality, enrichment of spiritual life, and enlargement of human fellowship. The obstacles, however, are so great that they can be overcome only by that sacrificial spirit of love which is ready to suffer and to die in the true service of God and man. But the removal of these obstacles is never an end in itself; it is only a means to facilitate the fellowship of love. Social reconstruction should be inspired by, and should culminate in, this fellowship. Otherwise, its issue will be a fool's paradise; for "man," as a spiritual being, "shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. iv. 4).

We conclude, then, that the Gospel of Jesus was inherently a social Gospel. It was heralded and unfolded through the medium of a public ministry that was wholly vicarious in virtue of the spirit of love which inspired and controlled it. The only social Gospel is the old Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus, the Gospel of the kingdom of Love, which was formulated in history in terms of the vicarious

and sacrificial ministry of Jesus. The love of Jesus, not the wrath of God, is therefore the *constraint* of this Gospel.

### III. THE ATONING SACRIFICE

The ministry of Jesus was vicarious in that its historical operations were dynamically sacrificial.

We have now determined the nature of the "social" and have resolved it into a fact of unifying and reconciling love. It remains for us to indicate briefly those social and sacrificial features of the historical life of Jesus which illustrate his personal and vicarious love.

At the very outset, we may call attention to that general principle of Jesus' behavior which manifested his love and was inspired thereby. It is expressed in the fact that Jesus maintained all contacts with his fellow men. He never broke with men; he never detached himself from his kind. He was no radical, no iconoclast, no prophet of the wilderness. Jesus reformed from within, not from without. He came to fulfill, not to destroy. He viewed his Gospel as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. v. 17). Jesus could be excused, in view of the treatment he received, if he became embittered, if he washed his hands of all responsibility, if he severed all relations and gave up in despair.

Such, however, was the vicarious and sacrificial love of Jesus that he did none of those things which, humanly speaking, would have been perfectly natural and excusable under the circumstances. On the contrary, he preserved all contacts in the face of well-nigh insuperable obstacles, and in spite of official hostility and persecution. This fact illustrates

his wondrous love, for love "endureth all things" (I Cor. xiii. 7). Jesus went on with his task and finished his work. His vicarious love expressed itself in what he suffered for righteousness' sake. His contribution toward the solution of the social problem resolved itself into the spontaneous service of sacrificial love. The same can be said of the whole career of Jesus.

Take, first, Jesus' relation to the historic Church. This cannot be understood apart from his vicarious and sacrificial love. The religious heritage of Jesus centered in the Church. It was the house of prayer, the custodian of the Scriptures, the abode of the Father. Jesus was brought up in its fellowship and he grew in the knowledge of God through its ministry. Its ordinances first made known to him the power of prayer and the glory of the holy writings.

But this very Church, which had meant so much to Jesus, turned entirely against him. It disowned him, ostracized him, hounded him to his death. In spite of this, Jesus never broke with it; he kept up his custom of going to church (Luke iv. 16). Had he severed his connection with it altogether and launched a rival movement, there would have been little ground for either surprise or disapproval. Many others since his day, faced by a like situation, have found no difficulty in taking this step, and their action has been commended and endorsed by posterity.

Why did Jesus remain loyal to the Church that repudiated and persecuted him? Was it not because he loved the Church as the Father's house? Was it not because he regarded it as a divine heritage of faith and fellowship, through which prayer and the Scriptures were conserved for posterity? And was

it not because he appreciated its value as a social organ of communal worship, which enshrined for men the appeal and power of the eternal in the midst of time? Though this Church sadly needed reconstructing, it was still for Jesus a divine institution whose ordinances unfolded the divine will and mediated the divine presence. God could still be found there by the heroic of faith. It must therefore be maintained for the sake of its historic heritages and its religious potencies. This task is, to put it at its minimum, a *social responsibility*. But it is very obvious that its support under such conditions involved a sacrificial service of love.

Further, there is the example of Jesus in the training of the Twelve. Think of the material which he had to mold and of the extraordinary sympathy and patience which this task demanded. For the first disciples of Jesus were all ordinary men; fishermen, tax-collectors, and the like. Among them were neither scholars nor theologians, and all of them shared the nationalistic beliefs and prejudices of the day. Their views of religion reflected the legalistic and materialistic ideals of the schools, and their faith had been nourished in the atmosphere of popular movements and conventional shibboleths.

Jesus chose such men to be his disciples and then proceeded to indoctrinate them with his teachings. It was a tremendous task. The disciples proved to be dull of understanding and sometimes hard of heart. They frequently misunderstood Jesus, raised protests against his spiritual teachings, and wrangled among themselves for the position of preëminence in the coming kingdom. Jesus had to rebuke them on many occasions, and much of his teaching had to be held in reserve until the advent of the

Spirit (John xvi. 12-15). His progress with them was very slow, and their faith remained both weak and unstable during the whole of the time that he was with them in the flesh.

Why did Jesus persevere with these rugged and slow-witted sons of the soil? Was it not because of his faith in the power of vicarious love to triumph over all obstacles? It is true that appearances were frequently dead against this faith of Jesus and that it did not begin to fructify until after his decease. Even on the dark night of the betrayal, all the disciples forsook him and Peter denied him thrice. But that is not the whole story. After the resurrection the disciples saw the Lord, and their faith in him was renewed. They came back and were baptized with the Spirit of Jesus. They inaugurated that amazing crusade in the name of Jesus which launched the Christian Church upon its redemptive and triumphant career in history. What was the ultimate secret of Jesus' persistence in the training of the disciples, and what was the secret of that brilliant recovery on their part which has thrilled the centuries? There can be but one answer: it was the triumph of the vicarious and sacrificial love of Jesus. His love for them never weakened; "having loved his own, he loved them to the end" (John xiii. 1).

Again, we have the witness borne to Jesus by his healing ministry. Jesus was no magician, no medicine-man, no professional miracle-worker. Indeed, he eschewed such a reputation. He performed his works reluctantly and more and more infrequently, and he enjoined silence on the part of those who were healed. His vicariousness was a fact of "grace," not of miraculous gifts and powers. It was a reality of sacrificial love, not of theurgical gestures

and flourishes. To forget this is to relegate the healing ministry of Jesus to the realm of thaumaturgy and to rob it of its personal and redemptive meanings and potencies.

We can be certain that Jesus never healed to demonstrate any divine claims and powers, to make a display of any supernatural resources, or to provide any apologetic vindication of his messianic standing. All his curative deeds were spiritual "signs," and he never missed an opportunity to enforce their deeper meaning. When Jesus realized the danger of being popularly regarded as a mere healer of the body, he refused to heal promiscuously and confined his operations to individual cases. He no longer cured in public places, but worked in obscurity, and he placed greater emphasis upon the need of faith. His deeds were "works of mercy" which shone in their own light and had no ulterior motive. They were not calculated or inspired by any sense of duty. They were not designed to establish claims and thus to coerce faith. They were, rather, spontaneous fruits of that compassionate heart of Jesus which sought in this manner to relieve human suffering, and they illustrated that vicarious service of sacrificial love which is called forth by the needs of others.

Finally, there is the crowning demonstration of the vicarious love of Jesus in his atoning cross. It is a misrepresentation of the facts to contend that Jesus went to his death from a sense of duty, to fulfill a messianic and mediatorial task, to reconcile God to man and man to God, to perfect some forensic "plan of salvation" whose acceptance is the condition of saving faith. This view would resolve the sacrificial love of Jesus into a prudential and

utilitarian affair. It would rob it of its spontaneity, its intrinsic worth, its native appeal and power.

Jesus certainly sought to lead men to the Father, and the great passion of his life was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10). But this purpose represented a dynamic passion of vicarious love. It was wholly spontaneous, wholly unpremeditated, wholly without ulterior motives. The unique appeal and power of the cross are rooted in the inherent witness, in the disinterested and self-attesting properties, of the sacrificial love of Jesus. It is because this latter was wholly unadulterated, wholly self-inspired, that it possesses any appeal and power at all. It shines in its own light. Its challenge is formulated in terms of the challenge of life itself.

Any impartial study of the Gospels will reveal the remarkable fact that Jesus evolved no schemes, drew up no plan of campaign, broadcasted no program of world-evangelization, selected no disciples for the express purpose of inaugurating an international crusade. He simply went on loving God and man. He chose his followers "that they should be with him" (Mark iii. 14) and treated both his work and his men as ends in themselves. Jesus cannot be reduced to the level of a doctrinaire reformer or a messianic crusader. The story of his temptation in the wilderness makes it quite clear that he definitely refused this latter task. Jesus loved and served without thought of consequences and without expectation of reward. He went freely to the cross because his amazing love would not hold him back. It resolved, rather, to suffer death voluntarily because it could not deny itself, could not choose the "safe" path, could not be less than it was as a

dynamic and redemptive energy of vicarious sacrifice.

Instead of merely talking about love, as so many do, Jesus gave his disciples and the world at large an object-lesson on the cross. His love was like *that!* The crucifixion of Jesus reflects the culmination of that vicarious and sacrificial service of God and man which could not forsake its mission of love and was thus left with no alternative but that of reaching its climax in the cruel death of the cross. This latter confronts us, in that case, not with the unfoldment of a forensic plan or contract, but with an inherent demonstration of suffering love. It is the holy love of Jesus that is manifested in the cross, the perfecting of that love that is realized in its sufferings, the constraint of that love that haunts our souls and evokes the response of faith (II Cor. v. 14). It is a vicarious love, a sacrificial love, a redemptive love, a sanctifying love.

The cross is unique in its revelation and power precisely because of what led up to it in the mind and purpose of Jesus, precisely because therein is disclosed that utter obedience and sonship which characterized his whole career. For the vicarious love of Jesus was not a blind thing, a mere uninterpreted instinct and passion. All real love is intelligent and purposive. It is, in its outward expressions, a principle of considerateness and fellowship which blossoms into a social gospel and is fully formulated only in its service. Thought and purpose are thus developing properties of vicarious love, and this love can function only as a psychological activity of volitional aims and goals.

It was particularly as an enlightened love that the personal love of Jesus was thoroughly vicarious and



sacrificial. For the measure of its vicariousness would be determined by the extent to which its diagnosis of human needs, its interest in the welfare of others, its sacrificial operations and pursuits, were governed by a true estimate of the ultimate meaning and goal of life.

However, the *love* of Jesus, not its articulated programs, is primary for the Gospel. For the intellectual orientations of this love are merely instruments through which it strives to express its own spontaneous life and witness. The appeal and power of the Gospel are facts not of saving "points" and "plans," but of the dynamic and self-attesting constraint of the holy love of Jesus. This spirit of love received its maximum unfoldment in the cross; not in the cross, though, apart from the life of Jesus, but only as illustrative of that altruistic principle which vitalized his entire ministry. Not the cross only but the whole career of Jesus was vicarious and sacrificial in this respect.

While this is true in general of the whole life of Jesus, we must not forget that the cross represented *a new human achievement of vicariousness*, a new triumph of sacrificial faith and love, which crowned the appeal of Jesus and associates forever our salvation with his passion. Had he never been called upon to make the supreme sacrifice, had the revelation of vicarious love stopped short of the cross, it is hardly possible that the name of Jesus would have been immortalized in history. The probability is that his very existence would have gone unrecorded. The appeal of Jesus has thus been for ever clinched by the tragedy of the cross. It gathers now around the marks of the nails, the crown of thorns, the stricken face! The power of this appeal is forged in terms of that convicting and converting power

of the sacrificial love of God in Jesus which is fully and finally revealed only in the haunting shadows of the cross that will not let us go. The cross is thus central for the Gospel.

The story of Jesus in the narratives is largely the story of his passion and of what led up to it. Most of the events are viewed from that angle and are arranged accordingly. The shadow of the cross is upon almost every page, and the Gospel itself is formulated in terms of the vicarious death of Jesus. Evidently, this is symbolically the very heart of the Gospel in the sense that it mediates the full and final revelation of divine grace through the self-oblation of Jesus. It thus yields to him the authority of both Redeemer and Lord.

Ideas of sacrifice, atonement, expiation, ransom, substitution, and propitiation reflect phases of human life and experience, and they all have their place in an accredited interpretation of the Gospel. But they must not be literalized, materialized, legalized, and de-personalized. Their significance is inner and spiritual. Their formulation in language is essentially poetical and figurative. For example, there was never any occasion to appease the wrath of God, to vindicate His honor in any judicial fashion, or to pay a ransom to the devil. For God is unchangeable, and God is love (I John iv. 8). The story of the cross is not, then, the story of the "propitiation" of God but of the sacrificial love of God in Jesus. It was God Himself who took the initiative, who "so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (John iii. 16). God was already reconciled to men. The problem was that of winning men over to His side through the overtures of His vicarious grace.

There is, accordingly, a very real sense in which

we may speak of the death of Jesus as both a vicarious and an atoning sacrifice. Indeed, the whole career of Jesus was of this character. But, as his life was summed up in the cross and culminated therein, this description applies more especially to the death of Jesus.

We must, however, repudiate any interpretation of the aforesaid terms which would resolve the atonement into a legal and ceremonial transaction. The vicarious and reconciling power of the death of Jesus was, and is, an inherent property of his holy and sacrificial love, and was as such an inductive fact of life. The clue to these aspects of his death is found, therefore, not in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, but in the intrinsic potencies and resources of life itself. Life and love are, at their highest peak, essentially sacrificial, vicarious, and atoning. The death of Jesus possesses these features only in the sense that it reflects an objective operation in history of life's expiatory and redemptive agencies of love. It registered a self-oblation which, in virtue of its unique life-context of sacrifice, released sublimating energies of reparation and reconciliation in the very environment of life itself. The death of Jesus, as a self-oblation of holy love, mediates thereby a retrieving and representative operation in history of certain absolving and reconstructive forces of life which are objectively active in that very enrichment and enlargement of life that centers in the cross.

This, in general, is life's pervasive and structural witness to the sacrificial, vicarious, and atoning character of the death of Jesus. In what respect, however, are these terms applicable to the specifically religious aspect of the question? We can only

touch upon this matter and shall merely emphasize those religious features of the subject which stand out in the inductive witness of life.

The death of Jesus was a sacrifice in a twofold sense. First, it represented a perfect offering of himself in holy obedience unto God, a perfect self-oblation of filial love, in that it involved a voluntary acceptance of all the tragic conditions under which alone this filial obedience could then be fully consummated in history. Jesus made a perfect sacrifice of his life to God in the service of truth and grace. Second, the death of Jesus represented a perfect offering of himself for sin, the sin of the world, in that its unparalleled sufferings on account of sin reflected an altruistic activity of holy love that was perfect in its spontaneous and unblemished character. Both the untimely end of Jesus and its manner marked the price exacted by sin for the expiatory service of holy love under existing conditions. Jesus paid the price—he endured the cross. He bore in his guiltless sufferings the shame of others, the burden and penalty of their sin, and he made thereby a perfect sacrifice for sin. As sacrifice is inseparable from suffering, we must inevitably center the sacrificial ministry of Jesus in the unique and crowning sacrifice of the cross.

The death of Jesus was a vicarious sacrifice. This was so in the sense that it was occasioned by the sin of others, and was voluntarily endured for the good of others. It was in this respect a representative sacrifice. But it was vicarious also in a deeper, a more profound, sense. For it involved that unique bearing of corporate sin, of its extreme social penalties, through the spontaneous operations of holy love, which is inherently and inclusively expiatory

and redemptive. Some such sacrifice for sin was the sole condition upon which sin itself could be expiated and canceled, and it was required of each respectively or of some one representatively before salvation could become an actual potentiality for all. Jesus fulfilled this condition, thus doing for all men and in the place of each and of all what had to be done by all or by some one to expiate sin and to establish the new way of salvation. He paid the price of salvation, and his sacrifice was in this sense uniquely vicarious in that it was essentially "substitutionary." In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. liii. 5). Faith certainly endorses this language and joins in with its glad Amen!

Further, the death of Jesus was an atoning sacrifice in two very important respects. First, it absolved and wiped out the sin of the past in the very process of bearing and expiating it as a voluntary and vicarious act of grace. That is forgiveness. Second, its wholly unmerited and altruistic sufferings exercise a constraint of holy love which arraigns conscience and heart and reconciles man to God. We cannot go on smiting a stricken face! The sacrifice of Jesus, in its vicarious capacity, may rightly be regarded as a "ransom." It represented the price paid by Jesus for the very reconstruction of the environment of life itself. It may also be legitimately described as a "propitiation" for the sin of the world. The atonement reflected a dynamic process of grace, and it was made to God in the sense that it expressed a perfect reciprocation and unfoldment of His grace. For grace, in that it is both

expiatory and redemptive, is inherently and completely atoning. It atones for sin by blotting it out and by establishing the "new creation." It was therefore God Himself who made the atonement, and the grace of God in the passion of Jesus is the atonement.

Salvation is now a matter of returning to the Father through the constraint of that sacrificial love of Jesus which embodies the appeal of the divine love itself. Certain results of a cosmic, historical, and personal character have indeed followed this climactic demonstration of the holy love of Jesus. But these were not in his mind in any detailed or doctrinaire sense. They followed precisely because his love was wholly spontaneous, because it had no ulterior motive and was ultimate in itself. It was its nature to be utterly self-inspired and sacrificial, and its very soul was expressed in its divine readiness even to suffer and to die. This love has proved to be atoning and recreative just because it forges its own intrinsic appeal and shines in its own light. It involves a vicarious revelation of God and life in terms of that suffering grace which is structural in both. It constitutes their haunting mystery, releases their reconstructive resources, and conceals the eternal secret of the sacrificial God Himself.

The cross had to come; it was inevitable. The holy love of Jesus, in virtue of its heroic character and of existing conditions, forced issues, aroused opposition, precipitated a conflict of ideals and purposes which invited the "supreme test" and left the decision thereby in the hands of the Eternal. And God has spoken through the cross itself, for its unique appeal comes straight from His heart and its renewing power is the dynamic of His atoning grace.

But where was God, we may well ask, when the cross cast its sinister shadow upon the earth? Paul rises to the occasion: "God," he says, "*was in Christ* reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. v. 19). God Himself in Christ *was* the atoning sacrifice.

#### IV. COSMIC REDEMPTION

Again, the ministry of Jesus was vicarious in that its recreative potencies were organically cosmic.

We have already observed that the vicarious death of Jesus possesses an objective significance in that it has actually achieved certain objective results in history. Human history, however, is but a transient phase of a cosmic process which absorbs and develops all the events of history. What happens in history happens in the environing cosmos. It affects and modifies the whole cosmos. In fact, it is in this larger realm, in the universe itself, that everything takes place. History has, in that case, a range that transcends itself.

Ultimately, we live only in the cosmos. It is the cosmos as a spiritual fact with which we have to deal. It is the challenge of the cosmos that is inherent in the challenge of life. Jesus bequeathed his peace, the peace that he himself had achieved, to his disciples on the ground that he had overcome the cosmos (John xvi. 33). All our actions, in virtue of their relation to the environing whole, transcend their own history. They possess cosmic potencies; they affect the universe. It follows that the death of Jesus was as a fact of history a cosmic event, a reality of cosmic sequences and significances. This adds to the mystery of his vicarious sacrifice; for this is now rooted in the mystery of the divine

life itself as an ultimate mystery of goodness and grace.

According to Paul, the reconciliation effected by the cross of Jesus is first and foremost a cosmic fact, and is both impersonal and objective. "God," says Paul, "was in Christ reconciling the *cosmos* unto Himself." This larger conception of reconciliation is fundamental in the apostle's interpretation of the cross. The death of Jesus achieved something for the cosmos in a very real sense. It transformed the cosmic environment for all, generated and released cosmic energies of spiritual renewal, and swung the whole cosmos thereby over to the side of God.

The whole cosmos shares, therefore, in the redemptive process. It has been recharged with regenerative potencies and is already in this impersonal sense a "reconciled" universe. For it ministers redemption on conditions, and salvation has thus become a potentiality for all. Jesus dwelt therein, and it was in its arena that he achieved his triumph of love. That changed the face of things, and the cosmos functions now in terms of the vicarious and reconciling grace of Jesus. Its resources are recuperative. Its appeal and power are energies of redemptive grace. The cross has re-formed it, has revitalized it, and has won it over as an instrument of that holy love and divine compassion through which the living God forgives and saves us from the blight of sin. A world in which Jesus lived and died can never resume operations on the old terms! His very presence in it and his work for it have raised it to higher levels of obligation and achievement.

Chronologically, then, world-redemption comes first in the sense that the objective results of history are first only existentially and impersonally alive.



Personal salvation is an inner reality of volitional appropriations of faith. Such appropriations are possible, however, only in a reconciled universe in which the sacrificial God is graciously active in Jesus, in his mind and spirit, for the salvation of men. It is now only in and through this objective witness and operation that the Gospel unfolds its appeal and power on the field of history.

The vicarious love of Jesus has, accordingly, been incorporated in the cosmos as a vitalizing and reconstructive energy of divine grace. Jesus has captured the universe. He has converted it into an arena in which the redemptive God makes His immortal appeal to the hearts of men. He has transmuted its omnipotence into an almightiness of love. The platform of the universe has now become the pulpit of the Gospel. The reconciliation of the world, the cosmos, unto God is an accomplished fact of history, and this objective achievement has brought personal salvation within the reach of all. The vicarious sacrifice of Jesus and the spiritual dynamic of the cross are therefore, as existential facts, objective realities of our cosmic environment. History has received them. The universe has absorbed them. The cross is now in the field. Grace is in the world and has begun its grim conflict with sin. There can be only one issue; the final victory is only postponed. For the cosmos is on the side of the cross, and grace is stronger than sin. The "grace" of "the Lord Jesus" has become the Gospel of a redemptive universe.

This objective witness of grace has, through the cross, reconstructed for all the very environment of life itself. It has actually revolutionized life, enriched the cosmos, and transformed history itself. It has given birth to new ideals of faith and fellow-

ship. It has released recreative energies of behavior and character and has organized on the field of time the immortal and invincible crusade of vicarious and sacrificial love. The challenge of life has now resolved itself into the evangelical challenge of grace.

But the vicarious death of Jesus is objectively significant not only as a cosmic event (Col. i. 20). It is so also in its personal bearings as a "representative" event (Rom. v. 10). There is a profound sense in which the cross has already reconciled humanity to God. It has won recognition for God. It has put men under His saving power. It has removed obstacles to fellowship with Him and has pledged the ultimate triumph of His grace. The God of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has established His sovereignty over heart and conscience, and has made it impossible for us to resist His advances of grace without self-condemnation. There can, however, be no question of "transferred penalties." The death of Jesus was certainly not representative in this mechanical sense. It was, on the contrary, an act of self-giving which was objectively representative in virtue of its inherent spiritual properties and contexts of grace.

All this has been accomplished by the cross as a representative achievement only in the sense that it paid the price for a full and final revelation of God and life and love. It released those reconstructive potencies of salvation which are now available for all as free gifts of faith. It achieved this at the cost of unparalleled suffering of mind and body—yes, and of soul. Consequently, its enrichment of life and personality is now ours without those expiatory and propitiatory pains and conflicts which attend any effort to wrest from life its supreme gifts

under existing conditions, and which represent the toll that is exacted by coercive and retributive circumstances for the reconstruction of life and character in those circumstances.

We have already observed that the ideas of propitiation, expiation, substitution, and the like all represent real facts and phases of human life and experience, and that they illustrate the inherent properties of all vicarious service. They imply that there is some deeply rooted spirit of "alienation" in human life which can be destroyed only through the medium of heroic adjustments and assimilations. For example, there exists a structural alienation between life and the *status quo* of moral inertness and transgression which must be removed before life will cease to thwart and condemn us and will come over to our side. Life itself must be appeased and propitiated, its authority and challenge must be respected and accepted, before it will consent to bless us. Of course, we may substitute God for life in the sense that He Himself is responsible for the precise constitution of life. But, in both cases, propitiation is a matter not so much of expiating the past as of responding in the present to the recreative ministries of goodness and grace.

The price which life exacts for its propitiation is heroic and sacrificial living in the present. None but the brave, the spiritually adventurous, enter fully into its inheritances. Jesus himself has shown us the way, the only living way. Through the cross he propitiated life, accepted its terms, obeyed its laws, overcame its alienation, and satisfied thereby those conditions which govern the release of life's coöperative powers and the restoration of harmonious relationships. Jesus reconciled man to life, to

God, through the sacrificial grace of his vicarious cross.

However, the idea of propitiation is inseparable from that of expiation. The task of the former is to convert the estranged and unfavorable into an ally, to remove the cause of offense, through some offering or sacrifice whose nature is such as to involve an actual readjustment of relationships. Propitiation is the end of a process, the achieved result. Expiation covers the actual operation of this process. In fact, it is the process itself.

It is evident that the alienation of life is the fruit of that perversity of the human heart which has resulted in the formation of wrong habits of character. These have fructified in false attitudes and refractory dispositions which are responsible for all sorts of maladjustments. We must then inevitably reap what we sow. We must suffer the penalties of evil-doing. We must expiate our sins. This is the only condition upon which life will allow us to survive at all, and even then the expiation if unaccompanied by penitence is not effective unto salvation. However, this expiatory process may be concentrated in *one representative self-oblation of love* whose character is such as to revolutionize the very nature of life, so that life itself becomes now a recreative and reconstructive organ of divine grace. Jesus expiated all sin in this sense. He suffered the penalties thereof in the very process of establishing the reign of grace and he thereby destroyed the rule of sin itself.

The redemptive potencies of the cross possess, therefore, a cosmic range, and the vicarious sacrifice of the cross was both representative and substitutionary in an impersonal and objective sense. Jesus

died for all and in the place of all in that he has brought all into new relations with life and with God. Salvation is no longer a matter of expiation but is the free gift of God's abounding grace in Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel of the cosmic cross.

## V. THE PERSONAL APPROACH

Finally, the ministry of Jesus was vicarious in that its redemptive significances were uniquely personal.

We have already found that the fundamental facts of the Gospel are not bare empirical and historical facts relating to the earthly life and death of Jesus. They are realities of his spiritual character, facts of religious insight and faith, which unfold themselves only within the context of spiritual experience and fellowship. They are essentially, in this respect, personal facts of faith, and they demand for their interpretation a personal approach of faith.

Secular writers could never have brought to light the rich values and meanings of the unique life and character of Jesus. What could have been done by such has already been placed on record in the histories of Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius. These writers saw little or nothing in Jesus. One of them dismissed him in a few words; another makes mention of him only in a brief sentence and even misspells his name. If Jesus had to depend upon the wisdom of the world, then it is obvious that his Gospel would have been stillborn. The dénouement of that wisdom in history was the rejection of Jesus and the horrible tragedy of the cross! The inner glory of Jesus was always hidden from the worldly wise.

Ultimately the vicarious ministry of Jesus was, in all respects, a fact of inner potencies and signifi-

cances which could be only spiritually discerned. Its divine character and power can therefore be fully apprehended only in the life of faith, only in "the fellowship of his sufferings." The reconciliation which it effects is fundamentally inward and personal and its true nature is disclosed only in such experiences of saving grace.

While it is true that a world in which and for which Jesus died is already adjusted to the fulfillment of the divine purpose and the salvation of men, it is clear that personal redemption can be mediated only through faith-appropriations of our objective and cosmic heritage. We are being saved only as we absorb our environment of grace, and only as we experience the growth of Christian character. Much of this assimilation is, of course, both unconscious and inevitable. However, the reconciliation is only formal unless it involves definite volitional appropriations and dedications of faith. Grace cannot otherwise become regulative in ordinary conduct, and we shall then be at the mercy of that "inarticulate goodness" which is the plaything of the devil.

It was the inner spirit of Jesus, the spirit of grace and redemption, apprehended by his followers in the fellowship of faith and love, that rescued his personality from utter obscurity and immortalized his name as Redeemer and Lord. But this faith and love were creations of his own reconciling spirit of grace in the hearts of those who responded to his appeal. It was this inner experience of Jesus that brought the records into existence, that now animates them as their very soul and infuses them with whatever power and significance they possess. Their facts must therefore be devotionally construed as

facts of spiritual emotions, perceptions, and appropriations. The names and offices claimed and reserved for Jesus alone are relevant only in this environment of spiritual experience. They must be ethically and religiously, not metaphysically, interpreted; for they represented emotional reactions and confessions of faith and love.

Our Gospel facts are thus essentially Christian facts which inhered in the redemptive potencies of the vicarious spirit of Jesus. They are spiritual in character, spiritually assimilated, and spiritually discerned. The early Christians discovered through their response of faith to Jesus that he had done something wonderful for them and in their own souls. He had initiated a reconciling work of God. He had stood between them and some horrible alternative and had captured their hearts beyond recall. He was for them, as an actual fact of moral and spiritual experience, all that they claimed him to be: the Christ, the Redeemer, the Lord.

Not, then, in contemporary beliefs, not in historical dogmas, but in the gratitude of faith and love are we to find the one sure clue to the early Christian evaluations of Jesus and his Gospel. All their facts were saving facts, facts of grace, in which the bare material has passed through the sublimating alembic of emotional and redemptive experiences of faith and fellowship.

This inner reconciliation of their souls to God was for the first disciples the supreme gift of the Gospel, and it represented the abiding significance of the vicarious ministry of Jesus. This latter was thus a fact of spiritual properties, meanings, and potencies; of redemption from sin and of fellowship with God "in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24). For man is

a spirit and all his relationships are spiritual. Alienation is a spiritual fact which must be spiritually dealt with. The ultimate problem of life is to reconcile the spirit of man to both life and God, to renew a "right spirit" within him, to establish righteousness in the inward parts. The cosmos has already been reconciled. What is now needed to perfect the redemptive process is that inner renewal of the human spirit which shall eliminate at one stroke the disturbing and refractory element in life, guarantee a consecrated and redemptive use of all its resources, and establish a reciprocal ministry of grace. For sin is the essence of the wrong spirit, the source of all spiritual estrangement, the curse of the social order. It is ego-centric; it is self-will. It is inner rebellion of spirit against God and the moral order itself.

All sin involves negatively a defect of faith and love. It can be positively destroyed only through a divine influx of that faith and love which proceeds from the spirit of Jesus, that is, only through inward reconciliations of saving grace. It was precisely for this reason that the inner spirit of Jesus possessed for his early disciples a vital significance in relation to their sin and the sin of the world. It went to the root of the matter; it dealt with unrighteousness at its source; it solved the problem of sin for them by mediating the grace of forgiveness and of newness of life. Indeed, it proved to be an actual reconciling energy of grace in that it reproduced in them its own faith and love. They met God, and God came to them, in Jesus, and they found joy and peace in believing.

The basic facts of the Gospel were historically embodied in the external career of Jesus. But, still,



their personal and spiritual significance was a fact of faith. Paul's Epistles make this abundantly clear. They came before the Gospels and may thus be accepted as accredited representations of the vital emphases of the Gospel in early preaching. All of them certainly imply that the facts of Jesus were historically conditioned and expressed. But they assume also that these were essentially inner facts whose nature and appeal were personal, ethical, and redemptive. They were realities of the spirit of Jesus, and therefore of the life of the Spirit. To oppose Jesus to Paul on this matter is to invite us to discard both; for it is only in Paul's "gospel" that the full meaning and potency of Jesus come into their own. The basic facts are for him sovereign facts of reconciling grace which belong to the realm of the Spirit. They are spiritual realities to be reproduced within the soul of the believer by the indwelling spirit of Jesus.

Take, for example, the facts of the cross as bare historical events. These were, in a purely empirical sense, practically the same for the two thieves as for Jesus. No great difference was apparent on the surface. But there was indeed a profound difference which is fundamental for the Gospel, a difference which inhered in the ethical and religious, the vicarious and sacrificial, environment of the cross for Jesus himself. For the cross is now set within the context of his perfect sonship as a volitional and reconciling energy of divine grace.

How were these inner values and meanings discovered? Was it not in the first place through that fellowship with Jesus in the flesh which put the disciples under the power of his holy mind and will? They knew after the event that what led him to the

cross was his love for God and man. They had some experience of this amazing love and realized its fullness through what he voluntarily suffered in his death. They felt its cumulative constraint, they yielded to its power in responses of faith, and they found reconciliation with God and newness of life in the fellowship of his spirit. The revelation of the cross was for them a self-revelation of the spirit of Jesus which emerged in experiences of trust and faith, unfolded itself in terms of its redemptive fruits and results in their souls, and sustained itself through its own self-attesting witness (I John v. 10). The objective constraint of the holy love of Jesus issued in subjective experiences of his redemptive potencies and significances.

The first disciples discovered all this in the historical career of Jesus. They have reconstructed his story in terms thereof that we may rediscover these things for ourselves through faith-experiences and explorations of his inner mind and spirit. We must insist, then, upon the fact that there can be no real knowledge of Jesus apart from that personal faith in him which is inspired by the operations of his self-revealing spirit. We must put him to the test, we must surrender to his influence and power, before we can ever fathom the secret of his abiding Gospel. Those who have done this have found that inner reconciliation, that spiritual discernment and fellowship, without which Jesus must forever remain an utter stranger to men.

This revelation of faith can now be dogmatically analyzed and systematized in terms of its communal confessions and its empirical results in history. But it existed originally in the form only of spiritual perceptions and valuations of faith. Even to-day its

inner nature is hidden from the flippant and indifferent, and from all those who do not share its mediating spirit of faith and love.

It is therefore only as the spirit of Jesus is personally experienced as a vitalizing energy of redemption that there emerges the consciousness of the vicarious significance of the cross. Only then do we realize that what he suffered there he suffered for the world and, as each believer would phrase it, for *me*. Vicariousness is thus, in the last analysis, a personal fact of experienced results which are formulated in confessions of faith. It is only in this environment of faith and love that ideas of propitiation, expiation, and substitution receive their full and rightful meanings. They possess significance only as "altar symbols," and when otherwise regarded they tend inevitably to degenerate into pagan ideas. Thus it is profoundly true that, in every age, the personal meaning of Jesus can be only spiritually discerned and appraised. For this we must know *him*; we must share in some measure "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. iii. 10). The "foolishness of the Cross" will never be anything other than a scandal and a stumbling-block to the "natural man."

However, the inner valuations of the cross have, by this time, been incorporated in objective movements and institutions of history. Its renewing potencies are being concretely unfolded in the pragmatic triumphs of Christian behavior and character. History has endorsed the fundamental estimates of faith, and it joins with faith in ascribing to Jesus the titles of Savior and Lord. These valuations are matters of mere faith no longer; they have become accredited facts of history. This is particularly so

in the sense that the inner results upon which they are based are now progressively and empirically reflected in the ethical and religious developments of history itself.

This objective witness of history to faith, in the matter of the saving properties of the cross, is indeed a fact of considerable importance. But, still, it does not represent the intrinsic significance of the cross. This possesses a permanent and an eternal value for the human spirit in its ultimate relation to God and the moral order. And it is especially true that spiritual ideals are always, in this deeper sense, spiritually discerned and appropriated.

What applies to the cross holds good of the vicarious ministry of Jesus in its entirety. This was essentially a reality of the spiritual order, and its witness was centralized and maximized in the cross as a spiritual unfoldment of reconciling grace. It was thus a fact of inner meanings and values, of inner perceptions and assimilations; a fact of faith and love to be interpreted only by faith and love. This ministry explicates itself; but it does so in terms only of reconciliations and recreations of spirit, and of their progressive sequences in Christian consecration and character. Its significance commends itself only to those who are seriously disposed, and its meanings are formulated in terms of those inner changes of thought and practice which attend responses of faith to the spirit of Jesus. In virtue of its primary appeal to the soul of man, the scope of this ministry is spiritually inclusive. It involves an eternal mediation for the salvation of men and the ultimate triumph of divine grace (Heb. vii. 25).

In view, then, of the specific character of the vicarious ministry of Jesus, it is obvious that its

redemptive significances are essentially personal, and that they will unfold themselves only through the medium of a personal approach of faith. These cannot be impersonally imposed from without upon mind and conscience in any formal and standardized fashion. They represent inner facts of faith and fellowship and cannot be resolved into dogmatic mandates of belief without reducing them entirely to the status of oracular and magical events. To equate the living Gospel with its official creeds, with its theological systems, would be to invite interpretations of its regulative facts in terms of our divergent habits of thought and character, and to encourage thereby the growth of formalism, legalism, ceremonialism, and institutionalism.

No system of ecclesiastical doctrines can ever produce or even induce faith. This must come first as a reality of personal experience, as the fruit of trust in Jesus, as the creation of his spirit in our hearts; in whose light alone the doctrines receive their interpretation, not *vice versa*. Historical doctrines of the Gospel possess permanent value not as mandates for belief, but only as formal invitations to an experience of the Gospel itself. Salvation is by grace through faith; it is "the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8). It is an autonomous fact of personal experience.

The evil of externalizing and standardizing the inner facts of the Gospel, and thus of substituting the acceptance of doctrine for a living faith in Jesus, is best illustrated in the case of the vicarious sacrifice of the cross. Speculation has hovered with unparalleled persistency around this last scene in the earthly career of Jesus, and elaborate structures of belief have been raised upon its foundation. But, in their attempt to objectify its Christian facts, the

various theories of the atonement—moral, forensic, and so forth—have all too frequently succeeded only in petrifying and de-personalizing these graphic events of faith, or in reducing them entirely to the disembodied status of ethical and religious ideas. They are as such not realities at all, but are only speculative hypotheses which are wholly destitute of concrete moral import and potency. They can tell us nothing and can do nothing. They are only standardized generalizations which can cover all kinds of experiences and yet can represent none.

It is obvious that, on this basis, the facts of the cross do not confront us with personal and redemptive realities of grace which make their own intrinsic appeal and shine in their own light. They do not provide us with certitudes of faith, but only with an external and impersonal system of formalized dogmas and problems; only with an inventory of dogmatic data for creed-making. However, they possess some value even in that guise. As generalizations of Christian experience, they emphasize certain historical and objective ideas of the Gospel which have leavened the order of life, and which define our task and must regulate all its accredited explorations of faith.

All the facts of Jesus and the Gospel are therefore Christian facts, facts of redemptive experiences and significances, which unfold themselves only as we respond personally to the appeal and power of the inner mind and spirit of Jesus. They are facts of faith and love, for the reconciliation that Jesus effects is personal and spiritual. It takes place in our hearts and unites our "souls" to God. And it is directly mediated not through creeds and institutions, but through the inherent constraint of his

vicarious cross, and through this only as it issues in volitional responses of faith and experiences of saving grace. Reconciliation is, then, an individual matter. It is a reality of free grace, an experience of faith, a fellowship of love. "He *drew* me and I followed on"; that is the story of discipleship. "Who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*" (Gal. ii. 20); this is the wonderful secret of the vicarious ministry of Jesus. Personal love to Jesus, the fruit of faith and gratitude, is the only power that can fathom the profound significance of his vicarious work of grace.

Love, however, is a principle of reciprocation and reproduction. No account of the vicarious ministry of Jesus can be complete which stops short of its inner challenge for the life of faith. Indeed, no account thereof can be anything other than formal and impersonal, than mere opinion and hearsay, which is not the fruit of its inner reproductions in our own souls. All doctrines of the cross, apart from this, are only second-hand creations. They fail thereby to come to grips with the real issues and revolve within a circle of vague generalizations. They resolve the whole matter into a barren question of words and phrases and equate its concrete and dynamic values with technical ideas and dogmas which are utterly opaque and impotent.

The Gospel originated as a reality of grace in the inner behavior and character of Jesus, and it was interpreted and recorded as such only through the medium of experiences of faith which emerged within the fellowship of his indwelling spirit. Jesus did actually reconcile both the cosmos and man to God through his vicarious cross, and he did this in an objective and a representative sense. But this

fact would have remained unknown and fruitless apart from its own self-disclosures of faith in the hearts of those who yielded to the spiritual appeal of Jesus, and in whom the drama of his passion was *reenacted* and reinterpreted by his renewing operations of grace. While, then, salvation is indeed the fruit of inward and personal appropriations of the objective work of Jesus, it is equally true that the potencies and significances of this cosmic ministry were first disclosed only within the context of such appropriations. It was thus that they were brought to light in the first place. They can be apprehended and unfolded in no other way to-day.

Jesus must tell his own story to our souls, and we can grasp the import of his larger work in terms only of its inner reflections in personal experiences of faith. His mediatorial ministry was objectively completed in the cross, and this fact is apprehended by faith and by faith alone. But we shall know little more than this bare fact if we stop there. What he did for the world and for us can be fully and concretely explicated only as we receive his spirit, and in terms only of what he does *in* us when we put ourselves unreservedly under his power. Jesus alone can communicate to us the secret of his vicarious work, and he does this through reproducing and reconstructing its "inner events" in our souls by the power of his indwelling spirit.

We can therefore grasp the inner meaning and challenge of the mediatorial work of Jesus on the cross only by faith, and only as the atoning process is subjectively *reenacted* within our own souls in the fellowship of the Spirit. We must be crucified with him, buried with him, and raised again with him unto newness of life (Rom. vi. 3ff.). Ulti-



mately, then, the mediatorial work of Jesus represents an inward work of grace. It is a reality of the kingdom of grace, and its secret is released only in faith-experiences of the saving power of Jesus.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE KINGDOM OF GRACE

#### I. THE LIVING PRESENT

We have in the previous chapter associated the mediatorial work of Jesus with the kingdom of grace, and with this as it is experienced and interpreted in the fellowship of the Spirit. We shall now attempt in these concluding pages to make clear the sense in which Jesus is eternally alive in and through his continuing work of grace, and the sense in which the Gospel is thereby the Gospel of the living Jesus.

In general, we may call attention to the fact that Jesus himself is the living soul of the kingdom of grace, and that this kingdom is a reality of the eternal present. The grace of God that was historically active in his inner mind and spirit is now spiritually active in all its developments of faith in history. It is dynamically immanent in all its empirical products and institutions, in Christian character and the Christian community, as a reconstructive energy of life. It guarantees thereby for conscience and heart an ethical and a religious environment that is permanently alive and regenerative in its influence upon human life and character.

Revelation is therefore an actual *process* of reconciliation and redemption in history, which functions in our world through the immanent presence in life

itself of the gracious and renewing spirit of Jesus. The Gospel of the grace of God is, in the last analysis, a Gospel of spiritual life which can be apprehended only as it is experienced in the fellowship of the living Jesus. He himself must interpret his own Gospel, tell its story to our hearts, and write it down in the language of faith and love. It is the story of what he does for us and in us and of the love and gratitude he inspires in our souls. There can, indeed, be no understanding of the eternal Gospel apart from inner appropriations of the living mind and spirit of Jesus himself.

We conclude from the foregoing that the Gospel of Jesus and all pertaining to it, all its facts and values, belong essentially to the kingdom of grace. They represent, as such, realities of the spiritual order of life, of the mediatorial work of Jesus in our souls, which are mediated to faith only in the fellowship of grace. The Gospel is thus an inner fact whose significances are disclosed only by the Spirit, and only in personal assimilations of that Spirit which fructify in Christian character and in a present experience of eternal life. The living Jesus belongs inherently to the realm of the spiritual, the eternally real, in history. His redemptive work for us and in us functions in terms only of that divine order which is a reality of the ever-living present and is alone alive and abiding. This is the sphere of all personal and creative activity, and it is here that everything originates and transpires.

However, the facts of the Gospel did not emerge in the void. They were empirically embodied, in the first instance, in the earthly career of Jesus. But all such embodiments were, in their external character, essentially casual and impermanent.

They belonged inevitably to the historical process as ordinary and orderly events of common experience, and they shared thereby its human and ephemeral features and properties. This raw material has been incorporated in experiences of faith and is in its original form no longer at our disposal. These bare facts do not therefore represent the permanent verities of the Gospel, and precisely because they are now empirically unrecoverable.

All our available facts are faith-facts, interpreted facts. They relate to the inner meanings and potencies of the historical Jesus, of his inner mind and spirit, as a gracious unfoldment of the living God in history, who is for faith the creative soul of the spiritual order. It is to this order that Jesus belonged and that we belong. It is within this realm alone that his work of grace possesses significance. It is from this sphere of the living and eternal present that he makes his undying appeal to our souls. That the real Jesus always was alive, that he never saw death, that he is an eternal Savior, are fundamental facts of the Gospel which all may test for themselves in appropriations and experiences of saving grace (John xi. 25-26). The Gospel is thus intrinsically spiritual. It is a gospel of spiritual life, of eternal life in the midst of time.

Consequently, Jesus himself showed little concern for the body, for mere physical welfare and security. The body is the temporal and it is doomed to decay and perish. It exists only to be conquered and sublimated in terms of spirit, and in the interests of the more abundant life. Its dissolution is, accordingly, only a mere incident for the Gospel, and the terms "life" and "death" are reserved to describe

those intangible processes of the life of the spirit which determine the destiny of our souls (Luke xii. 4-5). The one concern of Jesus was with life and death as spiritual issues, in comparison with which the fate of the body is of little importance and need occasion us no alarm.

The Gospel, as a fact of the kingdom of grace, is therefore a reality of spiritual values and potencies. This is so in relation to all its experiences and events in history. For example, it was not theological restatements but spiritual deliverance that the first disciples got from Jesus. It was not messianic and apocalyptical beliefs that they absorbed in his fellowship; it was, rather, the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Jesus spoke to their souls, he dealt with their sins, he induced faith in the Father, he bestowed upon them his peace, he brought them into touch with the invisible realities of the spiritual order of grace. Peter's description of Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16), was not a theological definition but a "confession of faith" inspired by the Spirit of God (v. 17). To equate, then, the meanings of the terms involved with contemporary theological conceptions of the "Christ" and the "Son of God," is a wholly unwarrantable procedure. Such meanings belong not to the sphere of impersonal ideas, but to the realm of personal experiences of faith. Peter found the Father in Jesus, felt his touch upon his soul, and spoke of what Jesus had actually done for his own salvation. Such, indeed, was the nature of this experience of Jesus that Peter ascribed to him the very highest titles then in use.

It is certain that the early disciples made use of current Jewish expressions such as the "Son of

Man," the "Messiah," the "Son of God," and so forth, in order to formulate their experience of what Jesus was to their souls. How could they avoid this? Again, it is highly probable that many of the nationalistic and theocratic ideas associated with these terms were incorporated in such confessions of faith. But these were not central; they were only on the margin. They represented subsidiary ideas about Jesus which were only contingently related to the basic spiritual experiences of faith whose instruments they became, and in terms of which their inner and personal content must needs be defined.

The significance of all such contemporary expressions in the Gospels was primarily and fundamentally personal, spiritual, and redemptive. We can never discover what Jesus was to his first disciples merely by determining the historical and contemporary meanings of the terms they employed. For the original context of such terms was confessional, not theological. The disciples trusted Jesus, and he led them to a simple trust in God which brought peace to their souls. It was spiritual rest that they found in Jesus (Matt. xi. 28-30). We must get back to their *spiritual experiences* of Jesus before we can discover the real and abiding significances of the terms which they applied to him.

We conclude, then, that the self-interpretation of Jesus is mediated not through messianic and apocalyptic words and phrases or ideas and beliefs, but through the self-unfoldments of his spirit in experiences of faith. It is a process which belongs to the kingdom of grace and is a reality of the living present. Historical and exegetical investigations bearing upon the contemporary meanings of the

terms and expressions referred to cannot take us very far, for their results must necessarily be both impersonal and problematic. The story of the temptation of Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he definitely repudiated popular conceptions of the kingdom of God, and that he committed himself to a more spiritual and comprehensive view. His kingdom was neither here nor there; it was an inward and a personal kingdom of the eternal present (Luke xvii. 20-21). It was a fact of that divine order which is in history but yet always transcends it. Its truths are therefore not mere empirical facts of history. They are inner values and certitudes of spiritual experience and faith which belong to the abiding realm of the Holy Ghost.

All the facts of the kingdom of grace are thus ever-present and redemptive facts which unfold themselves only in the fellowship of the Spirit, and in terms only of the spiritual work of Jesus in our souls. It is indeed in virtue of this ministry of grace that we call him both Redeemer and Lord, and that he is not embalmed in history but is "alive for evermore." Our task, then, is to define the sense in which he is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever" (Heb. xiii. 8).

## II. THE HOLY LORD

Jesus is alive, first, in the sense that his spiritual character forges an eternal appeal to our moral nature.

He is the lord of conscience, the eternal judge of the human spirit, in that his holy example embodies both the ultimate imperatives and the ethical constraints of the moral order. His perfect obedience has enlarged the domain of righteousness, raised the

standards of character, and pushed the frontier-lines of duty and obligation into the realm of the infinite and eternal. Jesus lives not as a mere "spiritual influence," but as the holy Lord who ever confronts our souls with the immutable mandates of the eternal order of righteousness.

This century has been marked by the rigorous application of the principles of historical criticism to the study of religion, and more particularly of the Christian religion. Our Gospels have, accordingly, not escaped this process. The result is that we can no longer regard and interpret them as our fathers did. They have ceased to be "oracles" whose authority is literally infallible in every detail, and they are now "human" documents which must be estimated accordingly. We cannot to-day build elaborate doctrinal edifices with the same confidence and certainty, and merely upon an unstable foundation of proof-texts relating to sayings and doings of Jesus. There is no guarantee that we have any of his exact words. Indeed, all that we have are but impressions and reminiscences of his first reporters. To some, it is true, this admission may imply that nothing of substantial value is now left to us. We hope to prove that such a conclusion is both hasty and unsound.

We freely admit and accept the results of historical research in its relation to the study of the Gospels. But we claim also that such results have in nowise affected the fundamental message of the Gospel itself. Indeed, this has been dissociated thereby from its contingent supports in history. It has been brought into fuller relief and has been released as an eternal message which shines in its own light. For when historical criticism has concluded its



task, it has left wholly untouched that permanent witness of the Gospel which is reflected in the spiritual character of Jesus. This, at least, is beyond question, and it represents the constructive minimum that such a method conserves for us.

Taken altogether, the gains far exceed the losses; for the issues are now clarified and the central and abiding fact of the Gospel is made to stand out with greater effect and prominence than ever. Historical research can certainly claim the credit for bringing us face to face with the real problem of the Gospels, the problem of the spiritual character of Jesus. This represents their essential concern and the essential fact of Jesus himself. What, however, does it stand for? How is its appeal relevant for every age? In what sense is it a living fact of history?

Any adequate reply to the questions raised must be based upon a consideration of the precise nature of the character of Jesus as this is illustrated in its actual reflections, implications, and sequences in human history. We have seen that he is alive in the records in terms only of his inner spirit, and that this is the very soul of the Gospels and of the Gospel itself. Their appeal and power are based upon his spiritual character and are unfolded only through the medium of its personal and dynamic effects in human lives. For the meanings and potencies of character are disclosed in terms only of its achievements in personality and history. All character survives only in its accredited impressions, its reactions, its modifications of behavior. Its properties are facts of value and significance and they are intrinsically "human." Their nature is infallibly reflected not in some oracular system, but only in those recreative differences which they occasion

and establish in their own ethical and religious sphere.

Though we are uncertain, therefore, of the exact words and works of Jesus, his mind and spirit are still portrayed for us in terms of the impressions, beliefs, attitudes, certitudes, and dedications of those who came under his power, and who thus bore common testimony to his unique character and work. We can see the living Jesus even through the veil of their contemporary thought-worlds. Certified sayings are, then, wholly unnecessary; they would serve only to legalize that Gospel which is spirit and life. The abiding properties and significances of the spiritual character of Jesus are actually reflected through the mental and moral processes he set in operation in the lives of his disciples, and are revealed therein only as these utter themselves in their own language and ways.

To admit, however, that the spiritual character of Jesus could survive only in its effects in the lives of his disciples is to admit that it was *capable* of affecting them. But this implies that *it was humanly and historically conditioned and achieved*. It was not a fact of innate nature, of ante-mundane properties and affiliations, of miraculous heritages. For it could establish contact in history only in so far as it was inherently human, and its appeal and power could emerge only as constraints of ethical and religious example. To base the uniqueness of Jesus upon the virgin birth, for example, would be to convert a volitional achievement into a static and non-moral heritage. It would thereby resolve virtue into a question of heredity and environment, and would ignore entirely its personal and autonomous character.

So-called facts of parthenogenesis are freely quoted in defense of the aforementioned practice. But what possible relation can these have to moral goodness, and why resort to the lower creation for a foundation upon which the uniqueness of Jesus can be established? The realms concerned are obviously incommensurable. The doctrine of the virgin birth was a religious product. It emphasized the fact that the unique spiritual character of Jesus was the creation of the Holy Ghost, and that it belonged not to the realm of nature but to the sphere of grace. No one can dispute that it possesses permanent value and significance in this respect. But why mix up this spiritual birth with the natural and resolve it thereby into a gross physiological affair? To substitute an operation of the Holy Ghost for a natural human process, in this bald fashion, is either to eliminate *process* altogether or to resolve such an operation into a purely material thing.

We maintain, on the other hand, that the spiritual character of Jesus was humanly and historically achieved, and that its appeal and power rest on this foundation. They were products not of innate nature but of heroic volitions and dedications of faith. The ability of Jesus to save us to the uttermost is based upon the fact that he possessed our nature, shared our human limitations and resources, overcame the world by faith, wrested from life the revelation of the Father, and now actually delivers us from our sins and reconciles us to God through the achieved ethical and religious power of his holy example and personality. Indeed, the example of Jesus is relevant only as it implies a common nature and common resources, and his uniqueness is potent

unto salvation only as it represented the fruit of a courageous sonship that was achieved at the cost of sacrificial obedience and suffering.

The revelation of Jesus was, accordingly, the product of ethical obedience and religious consecration. His unfoldment of the Father proceeded in terms of religious certitudes of faith that emerged in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. It represented a human and historical achievement, and its insight was the fruit of the "good will" (John vii. 17). The practice of resolving this revelation into an oracular or a spiritistic affair would render it utterly destitute of all ethical potencies and significances, and would leave us virtually without any revelation at all.

There is no real antithesis, no absolute dividing line, between the human and the divine. The divine and the eternal are self-revealed in terms only of the human and historical, and not merely through them but in them as achieved facts of life and character. This is the truth in the doctrine of the incarnation. God was made manifest not "through" the flesh but "*in the flesh*" (I Tim. iii. 16). The incarnation did not involve a static revelation that was above history; it represented, rather, a dynamic achievement *within* history. It signified not the unfoldment of deity in terms of flesh, but the sublimation of the flesh in terms of deity. In other words, what we have in the incarnation is not the advent of the absolute God on earth in bodily form, but the emergence of the Eternal Spirit in the guise of a holy human example that was developed and perfected through the sufferings of the cross. The incarnation bears witness, then, not to a manifestation of the divine in terms of the human, but to a revelation of the human in terms of the divine;

which means that it reflected a living process of volitional consecration and achievement in history itself.

Jesus was one of us in every respect, sin excepted, and the foregoing interpretation of the incarnation yields to his spiritual character an appeal and a power which are abiding and immortal in their own right. This is so in two very important respects.

First, the spiritual character of Jesus is a *permanent ethical energy of inner righteousness*. It expresses for all time the spirit of truth, of justice, of holiness, and it confronts us thereby with the holy authority of the moral imperative. Indeed, as a matter of history, the actual potencies and sequences of the personality of Jesus have unfolded themselves in quickenings of conscience and transformations of behavior and character.

Perhaps this latter aspect of the spiritual influence of Jesus cannot be better expressed than by saying that he actually convicts the world of sin (John xvi. 8). His unique character, as a human and volitional achievement, arrests and arraigns our moral nature, disturbs and destroys our self-complacency, uproots false hopes, uncovers the hidden depths of our degradation, pierces the hard exterior of conventional righteousness, revives buried ideals and aspirations, haunts our souls, and ever puts us to shame. No one can seriously and intelligently confront the Jesus of the Gospels without coming under condemnation. To see Jesus with unveiled face is to become conscious of the utter self-centeredness of our own living. It is to catch a passing glimpse of the heights *he* scaled, but which *we* have unheroically refused. We investigate him only to find that he is investigating us. We approach him

as an ancient figure only to discover that he is our eternal judge. We can neither dismiss nor evade him; we must reckon with him as the holy Lord whose appeal to our moral nature is abiding and ultimate.

Second, the spiritual character of Jesus is *an ever-present dynamic of eternal life*. The first operation of grace is necessarily ethical. It strikes home to conscience and heart, convicts of sin, and leads to repentance. This, however, does not represent the total appeal of the holy example of Jesus. For our life is rooted in the eternal order, and no appeal can possibly be alive and abiding which does not touch the depths of our moral nature. Jesus stirs not only our conscience but also our spiritual instincts, and he arraigns not only our behavior but also our spiritual indigence.

The chief characteristic of the personality of Jesus was its vitalizing properties, and its greatest gift to men is enlargement and enrichment of life. Indeed, the ultimate object of the ministry of Jesus was to communicate life to men through fellowship with the Father, spiritual life, the more abundant life (John x. 10). The great boon of the Gospel is eternal life as a reality of the ever-living present. This blessing, however, is associated not with material interests and possessions, not with the horizons of passing moments, but with those inner and abiding values of life which resolve it into the sphere of the infinite and eternal. No outlook upon life can possibly be other than a source of spiritual delusion and destitution, of the very impoverishment of life itself, whose horizons do not encompass the universe. God has set "eternity" in our hearts, and we shall find rest for our souls only when we

dwelling in the fellowship of the infinite and view all things in the light of the eternal.

More life, richer life, is our crying need; and to live truly is to become a subject of that infinite and eternal order which is the fountain of all goodness and grace. Men have found this life, the eternal life, in Jesus as they responded to his spiritual appeal in all its fullness. Jesus is still the holy Lord, the Lord of our moral nature, in that he confronts us with the permanent constraint of righteousness, brings to us the horizon and atmosphere of the eternal, and forges his appeal in terms of the immortal life.

### III. THE ETERNAL SAVIOR

Jesus is alive, again, in the sense that his spiritual work constitutes the mediatorial ground of personal salvation.

We mean by this his work in us as the fruit of his indwelling presence and abounding grace. This work inspires the communal testimony of faith. Salvation is through the present work of Jesus in our hearts, or not at all. Faith insists that there is no other way. This alone is the mediatorial ground of our salvation.

All gospels of self-reliance, of self-mastery, based upon the so-called dignity of man, are utterly futile. They have served only to litter the highway of history with the bleached bones of those who trusted in them. Every such gospel of self-help has been wrecked sooner or later on the rocks of self-conceit and self-impotence. Salvation is always a gift to man, and it comes only through a surrender of heart to his *better*. It is the product not of works but of grace; of faith-appropriations and dedications of

spirit. And Jesus is for faith the only mediator of that life more abundant which secures our salvation. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John xiv. 6). To neglect this way is to seal our doom (Heb. ii. 3) and to commit what is now for the Gospel the cardinal sin of "unbelief." All other sins are swallowed up in this deliberate rejection of the Gospel itself.

Any casual reading of the New Testament will convince us that Jesus was for the early Christians not a mere influence or memory but a "living presence." The Lord himself was always near them and in them as the source of all comfort, inspiration, and renewal of soul. He stood between them and something horrible. He delivered them from sin and despair. He led them to God and to newness of life. He gave them the witness of the spirit. He opened up to them the realm of eternal life. They owed everything to him, and there was no name like the name of Jesus. Their story was a story of what he had done for them and was doing within them. It was a story of his living presence and power, of the love and gratitude which they felt toward him, of that loyalty and devotion he inspired which constrained them to cleave to him without reservation or recall. The Apocalypse of John reveals the extent to which the fellowship of the early Church was maintained and galvanized by faith in the living Jesus who is a present helper and Savior. Not, then, "back to Christ" or "forward to Christ," but "in Christ" and "with Christ" represent the watch-words of the New Testament.

The lordship of Jesus for faith is grounded in his historic personality and work as these are unfolded in the fellowship of the Spirit and in experiences of personal redemption. These latter gave rise to a



whole host of names which were applied to Jesus and reflected his significances for the life of faith. He is called, for example, the Lord, the Savior, the Mediator, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, and so forth. Such expressions abound in the New Testament.

This ascription to Jesus of the very highest titles was not inspired by any theological interest in his person as such. It represented, rather, an emotional attempt on the part of the early disciples to express in language all that Jesus was to them and had accomplished in their souls. They were devotional and confessional terms, not metaphysical and dogmatic. Jesus lived in his followers through his indwelling spirit of grace. He re-formed in them His own life in terms of Christian character. He saved them through this very process of reflecting his likeness; for salvation is Christian character (II Cor. iii. 18). The mystery of salvation is precisely this mystery of faith, which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. i. 27). Though the mediatorial work of Jesus is now incorporated in the very environment of life itself, yet it is none the less true that its potencies and significances are unfolded only in personal appropriations of faith within this fellowship of grace.

All our facts are therefore Christian facts, and they belong as such to that spiritual order which is a living reality of the eternal present. They are truly historical, but only as spiritual facts which are contingently embodied and revealed in history. For they transcend history in that they are not based upon historical events, but upon inner certitudes of religious experience. They belong essentially to the realm of the Spirit. Faith, grace, the

work of Jesus, the resurrection, the titles of Jesus, the Gospel itself, represent *spiritual* values and valuations.

The Christian life can never be resolved into anything other than a life of faith which rests on its own invisible foundations. It is never an affair of sight, of sensuous perceptions and evidences. "The life I now live in the flesh," says Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). But such a faith is not mere opinion or belief nor mental assent to creeds or to a system of historical events. Assent to anything is both unreal and unmoral unless it emerges autonomously as the fruit of convincing evidence. Faith is something very different. It is a reality of devotion and fellowship. It is trust in a person. It deals with the invisible and intangible, and involves risks. It is a volitional energy of heroic evaluations and dedications. All its facts are facts of grace which belong to the kingdom of grace. They are ethical and religious certitudes which vindicate themselves only in that fellowship with Jesus through which the living God comes to us and speaks his word of power to our souls.

Jesus is thus alive to-day as the eternal Savior, and is so precisely because personal salvation is actually mediated to men only through the spiritual work of Jesus in their souls, only through an inner fellowship of spirit with Jesus himself. There is no other way, for salvation itself is a process of absorbing the mind and spirit of Jesus. This is a fact not only of faith but also of history.

Personal salvation is, accordingly, never an external and informal affair of belief in creeds and historical systems. Indeed, we have good reason to

believe that the first creeds were not statements of doctrine but declarations of committal; that is, "I believe in Jesus" meant "I trust my soul to Jesus." Faith is the fruit of an experience of present salvation, and to have faith in Jesus is just to confess that he is actually saving us now. Apart from such an experience of his living presence and power in our hearts, what goes by the name of faith is nothing but dogmatic opinion or rank credulity. To strip faith of its inner and personal properties, of its courageous evaluations and dedications, of its autonomous and spiritual character, is to destroy it altogether and to substitute for it some bloodless and heteronomous system of apologetic devices which serve only to canonize mentality and to subsidize the *status quo*. Salvation then becomes a question of orthodoxy.

Little reference has thus far been made to the deity of Jesus. The question arises in this connection in the sense that it relates specifically to his work of grace. The term itself is not mentioned in the New Testament, though it may well be that the doctrine is based thereon and is implied in all its teachings. However, the term is in common use, and we should note at this stage the significance which rightly belongs to it on the authority of the New Testament itself.

Briefly, the deity of Jesus was a fact of his sonship, and both were achievements of faith and realities of grace. For the sonship of Jesus was neither innate nor static. It was, on the contrary, a human and volitional fact of developing personality in history. It needs no theurgical props, no apologetic supports, for it is intrinsically self-revealing and self-evidencing. It shines in its own light. But

how? Only in its own world and on its own terms; that is, not in outward events and demonstrations, but in spiritual renewals and certitudes of faith. This sonship is a reality of the spiritual order of life, a fact of redemptive potencies and significances. It cannot be impersonally demonstrated in any external fashion—by miracles, prophecies, and the like. All its fruits are inherently spiritual. Its vindication proceeds in terms of its own recreative fruits and self-attestations in experiences of faith and fellowship.

Consequently, faith in Jesus and an experience of his renewing grace, not miracles or prophecies, unfolded the fact of his sonship in the first instance. It was, as a spiritual reality, spiritually disclosed and discerned through the medium of its spiritual properties and achievements. It was never revealed other than to faith and in the fellowship of faith. Men without faith saw nothing in Jesus, and simply because there was nothing to see under such conditions! It was faith that brought all the facts to light, and this faith was begotten not by outward events but by the redemptive constraints of the inner character of Jesus. His sonship was declared by his power to redeem and to create in men a living faith in God which rests entirely on the heroic foundation of fellowship with the unseen God.

In so far, then, as the deity of Jesus is for the New Testament a fact of his sonship, it is thereby a reality of his spiritual character as this is unfolded in renewing experiences of faith. Two conclusions follow.

First, the deity of Jesus was *an achievement of faith*. It was fully perfected and disclosed only in the cross. It represented an ethical and a religious

development of sonship, of obedience and fellowship, through whose psychological operations the inner mind and spirit of Jesus gathered to themselves renewing and redeeming potencies of saving grace. The deity of Jesus is thus a historical fact of heroic and volitional faith. This is so in the sense that his sonship was constituted by an achievement of spiritual power and demonstrated by a redemptive unfoldment of this power in experiences of faith which brought believing hearts into fellowship with the living God.

The significance of this doctrine is therefore personal and spiritual. The deity of Jesus is for the New Testament a fact of faith which produced faith through its inherent self-witness. It was based, therefore, not upon some innate and preëxistent heritage falsely called divine, but upon ethical and religious achievements of Jesus in history. It belongs to his spiritual character as a volitional fact of grace, as a faith-reality of that spiritual order which though historically revealed yet transcends history. This, however, implies that the achieved sonship of Jesus was qualitatively "eternal" in that it represented an abiding fact of the ever-living present. It reflected as such a type of sonship which is always "preëxistent" precisely because it transcends and transforms history and is the *direct* gift of the eternal God. Time is eliminated in the fellowship of faith. There is neither past nor future; there is only an eternal present. Faith jumps history and traces the life of grace direct to its timeless source in God. It perceives that we came from Him and live only in Him. It originates all in His eternal counsels.

Second, the deity of Jesus is *a reality of grace*.

It is not some metaphysical and hypostatical entity, some magical spiritistic substance, which exists in static isolation. It is an ethical and a religious reality of redemptive meanings and potencies; a fact of grace, of faith, of the spiritual work of Jesus in our souls. He brings God to us and us to God in experiences of faith, and thus effects our salvation. To say this is to confess his deity. To say less is to be entirely ignorant of its true character. It speaks to us in the language of faith, not of metaphysics; of religious experiences and certitudes, not of theological hypotheses.

It will be a sorry day for Christianity when the Gospel is resolved into a system of theosophy, the deity of Jesus into an affair of oriental speculations, religious faith into a mass of esoteric beliefs, and eternal life into an adjunct of history and cosmology. Such tendencies are already at work in our modern world, and facts of faith are being converted into a conglomerate medley of fantastic theories and beliefs. The deity of Jesus will not yield its secret on such terms. It is a spiritual reality, and no man can call Jesus "Lord" except "by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. xii. 3). Jesus was the Son of God in virtue of that spiritual character which was fully perfected and is fully unfolded for faith only through the mediatorial work of the cross. But spiritual character is spiritually discerned through the medium of its own spiritual self-disclosures in experiences of its renewing grace. No one can know what the sonship, the deity, of Jesus means who has not felt its power in his own soul. We rightly call him our Savior and Lord only when we mean by this that his work of grace in our hearts unites us to the Father and bestows upon us his abiding peace.

No definition of the deity of Jesus is worthy of respect which does not resolve itself into a confessional declaration of faith that he actually does lead us to the Father, does renew our souls now, and does bring to us eternal salvation. Dogmatic pronouncements on this subject tend invariably to become both partisan and indecent, and they have done far more to make the name of Jesus a byword and an offense than all the haverings of infidelity. The fact that he continues to survive such misrepresentations is proof positive that his own inherent witness and power cannot be hid. They persist in virtue of their own intrinsic worth.

What can the deity of Jesus possibly mean to us unless it signifies that he is actually saving us now, leading us it may be along some *via dolorosa*; that he is holding us up in some brave adventure of faith and unfolds to us the glory of that vision of faith by which he endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb. xii. 2)? There is something extremely offensive in the practice of resolving "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. iv. 6) into theological and metaphysical shibboleths, something most unseemly in the all too prevailing custom of subjecting this sacred theme to the indignities of cheap platform discussions in public assemblies. It is not in such an atmosphere that Jesus unfolds to us his secret of grace. To champion the cause of the deity of Jesus can, indeed, mean absolutely nothing to us, or to God, unless we are thus defending our inalienable right to confess that he saves and keeps us now to the uttermost.

The deity of Jesus is, ultimately, a numinous fact of abounding grace which is revealed only to faith in the fellowship of the Spirit. To love Jesus and to find him worthy to be loved and followed with-

out reservation or recall, is the very essence of a confession of his deity!

We have no right, then, to excommunicate from the fold of Christ any who cannot mutter our shibboleths, but whose intimacy with their Lord is such that they will never allow it to become the shop-talk of sectarian platforms. What is there, for example, more shockingly indecent than the practice of desecrating the inmost sanctuary of the soul of Jesus, of converting it into a biological laboratory, by resolving its divine glory into a problem of obstetrics? To such a pass has the formalization and standardization of the Gospel brought us to-day that we are in grave peril of being overwhelmed by a strident naturalism which is all the more sinister because it masquerades in the guise of a militant evangelicalism! The secret of Jesus was not a physiological but a spiritual fact. It yields itself only in an environment of faith and love.

Salvation involves the perfecting of character. History identifies this process with the formation of Christian character, which is immortal in its own right. But this character is established only through the mediatorial work of Jesus in our souls, and this potentiality of Jesus for faith is his deity. He is therefore the eternal Savior, and he is alive to-day as the author and perfecter of that faith which is effective unto salvation. Jesus alone leads men into the full knowledge of God and renews our souls unto life eternal.

#### IV. THE INDWELLING CHRIST

Jesus is alive, finally, in the sense that his spiritual fellowship is the abiding constraint of sacrificial service.

It is generally agreed that true Christianity is



the salt of our civilization, and that real progress involves the incorporation of its ideals and standards within the social structure. This latter has been accomplished to a certain extent, and the social order is within those limits at least impersonally Christian. Even to condemn it, however, as entirely unchristian is tacitly to assume that there is such a thing as Christianity, that its ideals are supreme and ultimate, that they are regulative for human welfare, and that every civilization would be the better for its absorption of Christian values and objectives.

The Christian ethic is undoubtedly held in the very highest esteem to-day by all serious students thereof. It is accorded the place of honor among the ethical systems of the world. The only question is, How far is it practicable in such a world as ours? Our reply is that such a question could not be raised at this late date, that Christian morality would have ceased to be a living issue, were it not for the fact that it has been practiced, is now being practiced, and has been handed down to us as a living heritage of holy behavior and example.

History itself bears witness to the preceding fact and ascribes its greatest triumphs to the inspiration and the practice of the ethic of Jesus. The apostolic age, for example, stands unparalleled in the history of both the Church and the world as an era of heroic adventures of faith, of mighty achievements for righteousness, of sacrificial sufferings in the interests of humanity. These rest entirely to the credit of the early followers of Jesus. No disciples of the Master were ever so truly Christian, so fully imbued with his spirit of grace; and none has ever bequeathed to the world a nobler heritage of faith and love. Their valor and devotion were responsible

for the crowning achievement of that age, which was the launching of the Christian Church upon its redemptive and triumphant career in history. Again, where in the annals of secular movements can we find anything to match that renewing spirit of holy compassion which has inspired missionaries of the cross to push the frontier lines of brotherhood to the rim of the world? All these found their inspiration for the practice of the Christian ethic in the fellowship of Jesus, history's greatest benefactor. His spirit of love was the sole dynamic of all their enterprises.

This century has been distinguished from all others by the emergence of the social emphasis. We think to-day in terms of solidarity and the goal of all our programs is social welfare. What, then, is the specific message of the Gospel to such an age and in what sense is it true that its fundamental appeal is still alive and abiding?

In reply, we may call attention to the fact that this social concern of our modern world, with its versatile ideals of social service, is confined almost exclusively to the so-called Christian nations. It is true, indeed, that it is now spreading as a leaven among all peoples and that our age is marked by a social awakening. But how has this come about? How did it originate? There can be but one answer. It is the fruit of Christian influences, of Christian behavior and enterprise. It is the product of those religious, educational, and social forces which inhere in our Christian heritage. These have operated in different ways and their instruments have been legion. But to definitely religious and missionary activities belongs the chief credit, that is, to what is *distinctive* in Christianity itself. These activities

were inspired by the holy example of Jesus. He is immanently alive in all their developments as the supreme and abiding constraint of sacrificial service.

What, however, is the distinctive element in Christianity? What is its essence? Is it not the Spirit of Jesus; the spirit of love, the spirit of fellowship, the spirit of service? It is only in this sense that Christianity is practicable, that is, only as a service of love which is inspired by the indwelling spirit of Christ. For love is the very soul of the Christian ethic, and there is nothing to stop us from pouring out our lives in the service of love. What, then, is there to prevent us from capturing the spirit of Jesus, from consecrating our lives to the service of God and man, from yielding unreservedly to the power of the Holy Ghost? The Christian ethic has never, since the days of the Apostles, been applied in this sense on any large scale, and the difficulties are not intellectual but *volitional*. We lack courage, we lack that faith which endures "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). We are in the grip of the mammon of mere things. Jesus is too much for us. We are *afraid* of him!

There can therefore be no question relating to the pertinence of the appeal of Jesus for our modern world. For we have seen that the social problem is ultimately a spiritual problem. It is a problem of wrong desires, motives, ambitions, and purposes; of wrong behavior and character, of wrong thoughts and principles, of the wrong spirit. It is, in short, a problem of individual selfishness and sin. All these influences are socially disintegrating, and there can be no possible solution to the problem which does not demand a radical reconstruction of inner attitudes and dispositions.

This latter task involves the renewal of the human spirit in love; love, first, to God, and then to man. For love means sympathy, friendship, compassion, and service. It is the very antithesis of selfishness and sin; and as these are essentially disruptive, so love is the great social unifier. In fact, the social order cannot continue to exist except on the basis of sacrificial love. The inner morality of Christian behavior and character represents thus our greatest and most urgent need to-day. For that morality is based upon love to God and one's neighbor, which are the two fundamental principles of social well-being (Matt. xxii. 36-40). The spirit of Jesus is the perfect and ultimate organ of that love, and he is thereby still and ever will be the living Lord of love. The question is not whether his appeal is alive to-day, but whether *we* are going to take it seriously; whether we shall now listen to him, or whether we are going to continue trifling with things and making vain and unheroic excuses for our utter refusal to deal with the social problem sacrificially! It is *we* only who are spiritually dead to-day.

Ultimately, the problem of the practicability of Christianity can be solved only by those who put Jesus to the test; only by those who trust him wholly, who put themselves unreservedly under the power of his love. Indeed, this very process of responding to the indwelling Spirit of Christ is the practice of Christianity. Outside this environment of faith, however, the ethic of Jesus is absolutely impotent. For the social problem is not primarily a problem of changing circumstances but of changing men. The "new man" can be trusted to shape his environment in terms of his ideals, but no reconstruction of external situations can create within

men a new spirit. That must ever be based upon repentance and reconciliation, upon the fellowship of faith and love.

It is therefore only within the context of the "new creation" that the ethic of Jesus is practicable, and only through its medium that Christianity can function at all within the existing social order. This ethic cannot be applied impersonally and externally; it cannot be adjusted to present ideals and standards of conduct. It can operate only as a revolutionary power of faith, only as a new spirit of righteousness, whose very first task is to challenge and to change existing valuations, to create its own atmosphere and environment, and to infuse the body politic with the redemptive spirit of sacrificial love.

Love, indeed, is the supremely social; for love is "sacrificial social-mindedness." Christianity is thus practicable only as a holy crusade of love, as a religion which takes us to the cross, as a faith whose adherents are all ready to lay down their lives for the new order. It is practicable only in the sense that nothing can prevent us from making the supreme sacrifice for God and humanity. The social problem is at bottom a religious problem and the "love of Christ" is its only solution. Our task is to establish the "law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2), the law of love, as the regenerative principle of the social order. For it is the constraint of his love that first changes us (II Cor. iv. 14); "we love him because he first loved us" (I John iv. 19). Christian love is reflected love; it is the love of Christ "shed abroad in our hearts." This love mediates to us thereby his own self-revelation of grace, and it follows therefrom that Jesus is known only as he

is loved. He whispers his secret only in the fellowship of love.

Consequently, love to Jesus that reflects his great love to us, that is begotten in the fellowship of grace, is the only medium through which the Gospel releases its potencies and significances for personal and social life. Historical and dogmatic methods of approach can as little comprehend the soul of the Gospel on their own terms alone as they can dissect the glowing emotions of a love-letter. Indeed, they are likely in both cases to miss the soul altogether, and one task will then become just as insipid as the other. For a mere spectator who has not felt the tremendous ethical and religious challenge of the spirit of Jesus, the Gospel itself will possess just as much point as a love-letter that has fallen into wrong hands.

The foregoing comparison is not entirely inapt. For all the records of the Gospel owe their inspiration to the deep and abiding love of Jesus for those who left all to follow him, and to that constraint of his love in their hearts which was stronger than death. The full significance of the accounts becomes apparent only in the glow of this reciprocal and redeeming love, only in the sympathetic atmosphere of Christian faith and fellowship.

In the last analysis, the Gospel of the living Jesus is a *song*, not a creed. It can be set to music, but can never be embalmed in syllogistic propositions. We can march to it and can conquer with it, but we can never imprison it within any ecclesiastical ark. It is a reality of hymns, not of arid theologies. It can survive only as a living tradition, only as it is preached by word of mouth and by holy example, only as it is dynamically formulated in

terms of sacred emotions and purposes of love. For it emerged in history as a vitalizing energy of behavior and character, and it can persist only in this personal form, only as a renewing reality of personal experiences and dedications of soul. It functions as an energy of personality alone. In fact, it *is* personality in all its fullness of grace.

To resolve the Gospel, then, into an impersonal "deposit," into a technical affair of theological dogmas, is to de-personalize it altogether and to destroy its living and abiding appeal. It is not a barren fact of teachings and doctrines, but a dynamic reality of spiritual blessings which lift the soul heavenward and scatter themselves through the service of love. This Gospel is a symphony of redeeming grace; its fruits are love, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost. Its future is assured by its power to turn our wintry nights of unbelief into sunny days of believing faith, to raise us up out of the pit of despair unto the mount of vision, to pierce our disillusionment and to cause our hearts to break forth once again into singing.

The abiding Gospel is God's song of love in Jesus Christ, which reached its orchestral climax in the holy cross. The "morning stars" never sang so gloriously as did the early followers of Jesus, and they never sang under such great difficulties. Think of the task and situations which confronted the infant Church of the Apostles. It was sorely pressed, it had its back to the wall, it had to fight for its very life. But it sang its way out of despair into the glad victory of faith. Its members were persecuted, imprisoned, and put to death; which ought to have been the end of things. The young

Church, however, refused to die! When later it was engaged in the act of composing its records, it set them to music and bequeathed to us thereby a New Testament which resounds with the strains of unceasing praise. It is interesting to note the frequent use therein of the terms "joy," "peace," and "glory." Above the din of strife and suffering we hear the clarion note of song: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. iv. 4). Believers were upheld in tribulation by "the joy which is unspeakable" and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." "All things work together for good," says Paul; for nothing can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 28, 39).

What, we may ask, was the ground of this rejoicing? We have resolved the Gospel into a song; but what are its distinguishing notes and emphases? The answer is twofold.

To begin with, the Gospel is a song of *emancipation*. Its wondrous theme is the redeeming love of Jesus: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood" (Rev. i. 5). Not social righteousness but inner reconciliation with God was the great boon of the Gospel. Forgiveness of sin, joy and peace in believing, came first; social righteousness followed as their by-product.

Some to-day advocate an alliance of Christianity with Judaism on the ground that their communal message is primarily concerned with social righteousness. What would Paul, what would Jesus himself, think of this? For Judaism is essentially a religion of morality, while Christianity is an evangel of grace. Ours is a song of that inward and spiritual deliverance which has come to us through the vicari-



ous sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and through that as it manifests his love and proclaims the reconciling love of the Father. Jesus has brought to us not only a new vision of God, but also a new power of love which destroys our sin and renews our souls in righteousness. He saves us, lifts us up out of the pit of moral guilt and shame, stands between us and the horrible alternative of paganism. He gives us the victory over the world and its things. He endues us with the power of an endless life. We sing of that "love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. iii. 19).

Further, the Gospel is a song of *gratitude*. What accounts for the extraordinary devotion and daring of the early followers of Jesus? Were these features of their discipleship inspired by inner convictions relating to the civilizing potencies and utilitarian benefits of the Gospel? Our reply is a decided negative. They were, rather, inspired by a deep sense of gratitude to Jesus for the greater salvation which the Law itself failed to provide, and they reflected thereby spontaneous emotional reactions of faith and love.

The disciples of Jesus realized rightly that a great love does something for all and for each, and they discovered in the unique love of Jesus that redeeming and reconciling power which loosed them from their sins and brought them to God. Their evangelical passion blossomed in the soil not of doctrinal beliefs, but of unfeigned "gratitude." What possessed Paul, the rabbinical scholar, to turn his back upon a life of comparative comfort, to subject himself to all kinds of hardship and persecution for Christ, to become an outcast upon the face of the earth that he might preach the Gospel also to the

Gentiles? Can we not hear that haunting refrain of love and gratitude which burst from his very soul: "who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*" (Gal. ii. 20)? Paul had realized that man is the world in miniature, that all gifts to the world are therefore personal gifts to the single soul; and he had claimed and appropriated his heritage in Christ.

We have found that the Gospel belonged inherently to the inner life, the inner mind and spirit, of Jesus, and that it is immanent in the records only in this form. It follows therefrom that the self-revelation of the living Jesus must now proceed in terms of the fellowship of the Spirit, and through the self-unfoldment in believing hearts of the indwelling Christ. It is only in this sense that Jesus is alive to-day and "for evermore"; but this is the only sense in which the eternally real can exist at all. Jesus is, then, infinitely more than a mere memory or influence. He is still the living Lord of love, who loves to the very end.

Jesus lives in that his amazing love is still the biggest force in history. Herein lies the clue to his supremacy and permanency. He will outlast the centuries, his kingdom will rule over all; for his love is invincible and undying. That love has inspired the greatest achievements in history, and to its fellowship belongs the secret of all sacrificial service in our day. We shall never be fully ourselves until we are captured by this living spirit of Jesus. It still remains to be seen what can be accomplished by those who put themselves wholly under its power and who reach forward "toward the mark" of their "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 14). The living Jesus is the eternal Gospel. And its story is not embalmed in any historical documents

or systems of doctrine, but is daily being inscribed upon human hearts by the indwelling spirit of Jesus. It is an ever-living story of personal redemption, of that wonder of the grace of God in Jesus, of that fellowship of love, of that gratitude and passionate loyalty of faith, which culminate in the complete identification of the believing soul with Christ (Gal. ii. 20).

The way of faith is therefore the "more excellent way" toward the solution of the problem of the Gospel in terms of the living and abiding spirit of Jesus. Our study has indeed been in vain unless it has convinced us that the Gospel itself is an experiential reality of faith and that experience can be explained and communicated in terms only of life and experience themselves, never in terms of bare historical events and doctrines. It is obvious that nothing worth knowing or saying can possibly be recorded, at least on the subject under review, which is not the fruit of a personal experience of faith and of a perpetual and enriching rediscovery of the spiritual potentialities of the living Jesus for one's own soul. Salvation is by faith, and faith is to "put on Christ," to be possessed by his spirit, to be transformed by his fellowship. In Paul's words, "I live, yet not I, but *Christ* liveth in me."

We conclude, then, that the Gospel of the living Jesus is a vitalizing reality of the eternal present, that it is mediated through personal experience, and that its secret yields itself only in the environment of Christian faith and fellowship. Faith offers us the only clue, and its task is to reëxplore in every age the deep and exhaustless meanings of the mind and spirit of Jesus, to fathom his profound ethical and religious appeal to that which is fundamental

for the human spirit in its infinite and eternal contexts and capacities.

There is only one way of penetrating the mystery of Jesus, and that is by surrendering to the influence of his spirit of love. We shall begin to understand him only as we put ourselves under his overwhelming power. And as we sit at his feet and learn to know him anew, we shall discover again and again how modern and immutable are his authority and challenge, and how much he is worthy to be loved and followed without reservation or recall.



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